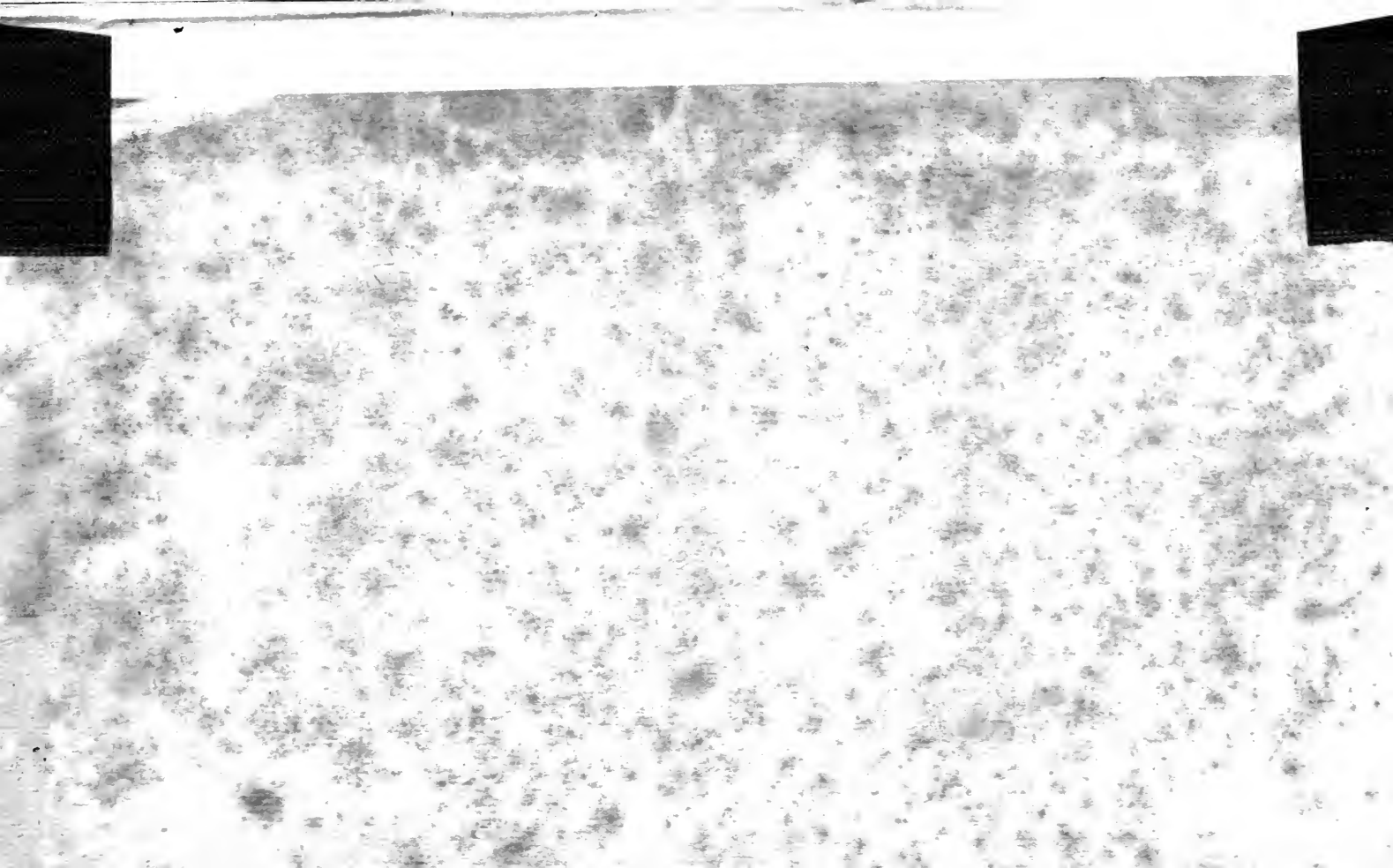

Queen Hynde.

A POEM,

In Six Books.

By JAMES HOGG,

AUTHOR OF THE QUEEN'S WAKE; POETIC MIRROR;
PILGRIMS OF THE SUN, &c. &c.

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TO

The Daughters of Caledonia,

THIS POEM

IS ADDRESSED THROUGHOUT,

AND MOST HUMBLY AND RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED,

BY THEIR OBLIGED AND DEVOTED SERVANT,

THE AUTHOR.

QUEEN HYNDE.

BOOK FIRST.

QUEEN HYNDE.

BOOK FIRST.

THERE was a time—but it is gone!—
When he that sat on Albyn's throne
Over his kindred Scots alone
Upheld a father's sway;
Unmix'd and unalloy'd they stood
With plodding Pict of Cimbrian brood,
Or sullen Saxon's pamper'd blood,
Their bane on future day.
Nations arose, and nations fell,
But still his sacred cītadel
Of Grampian cliff and trackless dell
The Caledonian held.

Grim as the wolf that guards his young,
Above the dark defile he hung,
With targe and claymore forward flung;
The stoutest heart, the proudest tongue,
Of foeman there was quell'd!
The plumed chief, the plaided clan,
Mock'd at the might of mortal man,—
Even those the world who overran
Were from that bourn expell'd.
Then stood the Scot unmoved and free,
Wall'd by his hills and sounding sea;
Child of the ocean and the wood,
The frith, the forest, gave him food;
His couch the heath on summer even,
His coverlet the cloud of heaven,
While from the winter wind and sleet
The bothy was a shelter meet.
His home was in the desert rude,
His range the mountain solitude;
The sward beneath the forest tree
His revel-hall, his sanctuary;
His court of equity and right,
His tabernacle, was the height;

The field of fame his death-bed stern,
His cemetery the lonely cairn.

Such was the age, and such the day,
When young Queen Hynde, with gentle sway,
Ruled o'er a people bold and free,
From vale of Clyde to Orcady.
The tale is old, but the event
Confirm'd by dreadful monument.
Her sire had eastern vales laid waste,
The Pict subdued, the Saxon chased,
And dying old and loved, resign'd
The sceptre to his lovely Hynde.

Each warrior chief of name was there,
Each bard, and grey-hair'd minister,
When the old king, in accents mild,
Commended to their love his child.

" My friends, your faith has oft been seal'd,
In counsel tried, and bloody field;
For Scotland's right, by foes o'errun,
We pledged our lives—we fought and won;

Now every Scot can wander free
From hill to hill, from sea to sea.
Thanks to your worth—the throne is fast.
Now list my suit;—it is the last.

" One child I have, and one alone,
To fill my father's ancient throne;
Your virgin sovereign you behold—
I speak not of her beauteous mould,
But, if affection do not blind,
I vouch her energy of mind;
Here pledge your honours, still to be
To her what you have been to me."—

Each warrior vow'd upon his brand,
And, kneeling, kiss'd the maiden's hand;
Each grey-hair'd sire, with moisten'd eye,
Swore by his country's liberty.

The king then rose upon his bed,
And, leaning forward, bent his head;
His silver locks waved o'er his cheek,
Like winter clouds on mountain bleak,

And like that mountain's hoary form,
All blench'd and wither'd by the storm,
Was every feature's grisly cast,
—Pale, but majestic to the last.

" Grieve not, my gallant friends," he said,
" That by a queen the land is sway'd ;
When woman rules without control,
Her generous but dependent soul
To worth and wisdom gives command—
And then 'tis man that rules the land.

" But when in second place she sits,
Then all her cunning, all her wits,
Are on the stretch with knaves to league,
And rule the king by court intrigue.
Trust me, 'tis truth to you I tell—
I have been tried, and know it well !—
A queen by men of wisdom rules,
A king by mistresses and fools.

" Now note my will—My daughter Hynde
Must wed the knight that suits her mind ;

Her choice no interest let revoke,
Be it as free as bird on oak,
Or the grey eagle of the rock.
But suffer not, on any plea,
A lover to her privacy;
No breathings of ecstatic bliss,
No fond caress, or burning kiss,
May be allow'd, else all is done—
A coxcomb shall the lady won,
And Albyn's ancient royal blood
Run to a weak and spurious brood.
Forbid it, God!—In time to be,
Should my unbodied spirit see
A son of mine to sloth betake,
Or sleep while warriors toil and wake:
On such my soul shall never tend,
As guardian angel or as friend!

"These woes and failings to prevent,
Let young Queen Hynde, in royal tent,
Hear chiefs debate on government;
Mark all their feats in bold tournay,
And list their love or warrior lay;

And thus, her keen and piercing sight
Can hardly fail to judge aright.

" Think of this charge—much it portends;
I go—but not resign my friends;
No home I'll seek within the sky;
My patriot soul shall hover nigh,
To watch your actions, mark your deeds
In battle-field, where glory leads;
And o'er the counsel group, reclined
Upon the eddy of the wind,
I'll list how truth your counsel brooks,
And read your spirits in your looks.

" Woe be to him whom I observe
Daring from loyalty to swerve!
Though neither blood nor bone invest
The living flame within this breast,
That flame shall sear his palsied sight,
With shades of horror strew the night,
Load with disgust the light of day,
His motions cross, his path belay;

Each warden spirit's arm control,
And whisper vengeance to his soul,
Till down the miscreant shall be driven—
The hate of man, the scorn of heaven!

"Be thou, my child, upright as fair,
And thou shalt be my special care;
And oh! should power's temptations try,
Think of thy father's spirit nigh:
Be that thy stay on ruin's brink.
Nor tongue may frame, nor heart may think,
How distant far such crime will spurn
The kindred minds that round thee burn.

"I may not warn thee face to face;
But still, when danger or disgrace
Unseen approaches, I'll be nigh;
Therefore, my child, on dreams rely.
Then to thy spirit's eye unfurl'd,
I'll hold, in shadowy courses hurl'd,
The motions of the moving world.
Farewell—be calm—my time is nigh;
Would that the parting throe were by!"—

He stretch'd him on his couch, resign'd;
The ruthless foe of human kind,
Whom he had met mid fire and storm,
And braved in every hideous form,
Now unresisting found his arm,
And stopp'd the tide that scarce was warm.

No plaint—no groan hung on his breath,
To gratify the ear of death;
Steady and dauntless was his look,
As one a bitter draught who took,
Or, for the sake of health to be,
Suffer'd a transient agony:
On that pale face, when turn'd to clay,
When lifeless on the couch he lay,
A bold defiance still was blent,
Uncancell'd, with each lineament.

The cross was o'er the body hung,
The royal coronach was sung,
And paid each rite, each honour due,
To sire beloved and sovereign true;

And young Queen Hynde holds the command
O'er Caledon's unconquer'd land.

High were the hopes her chiefs among,
Their emulation great and strong;
Before their queen in circle set,
When for deliberate counsel met,
Never was heard such manly sense,
Such high and moving eloquence;
Never did armed list present
Such bold and rapid tournament;
And when the festal days came on,
Such gallant splendour never shone
In royal halls of Caledon.

Then did the towers with echoes ring,
For every knight his song would sing,
Whether his voice to music's tone
Had note of harmony or none;
And, strange though seems the incident,
Those who sung worst were most intent.

No smile, no marvel let arise,
That such the strife, when such the prize—
A flower in Albyn never shone
Like Hynde, the Queen of Caledon.

The Lord of Moray, famed in war,
Proud Gaul of Ross, and lordly Mar,
Were first in rank and wide control,
And others shrunk before their scowl.
Young Allan Bane was brave and bold,
And Sutherland of manly mould;
And Donald Gorm, of lion eye,
Chief of the kindred tribes of Skye,
Was such a knight in heart and mien
As Skye again hath never seen.
Yet, after year and day was past,
It was not trow'd, from glances cast,
Who would be chosen king at last.

Once on a day—a day it seem'd
When more than earthly splendour beam'd
On Appin hills, that tower'd on high,
Like golden columns to the sky,

Bathed in the glories of the morn,
That, west in airy rivers borne,
Stream'd over all the woods of Lorn—
Queen Hynde upon the mountain leant;
She wist not how or why she went;
But there she sat, by old grey stone,
Upon the flowery sward alone;
The day-breeze play'd in eddies weak,
And waved the rock-rose to her cheek;
The little ewe-flower starr'd the lea,
The hare-bell nodded at her knee,
While all the sward in summer prime
Was woven with the moorland thyme.

Blithe was her bosom's guileless core,
Unthoughtful all of woes before;
With nature's beauties glow'd her mind,
She breathed a prayer for all mankind,
Pondering of nought but onward bliss,
And peace, and love, and happiness.

How transient all we here enjoy!
How short our bliss without alloy!

While thus she lay, with heart elate,
In nature's purest blissful state,
She heard a voice rise from the ground,
With hollow, soft, and moving sound;
Fix'd was her eye, and mute her tongue,
While thus some viewless being sung:—

Song.

" The black bull of Norway has broken his band—
He's down through the links of fair Scotland;
And the flower of the isle shall be lost and won,
Ere ever he turn his horn from the sun."—

She look'd around with eyes intent,
In breathless dumb astonishment;
No living thing she could espy,
Yet still a sound was murmur'd nigh!
It sunk into a mournful tone,
And flitted like a passing groan.

She deem'd she lay on fairy ground,
By some unearthly fetters bound;

For why she came so far astray,
Or why she did not haste away,
She nothing knew. The east grew dun,
A cloud came floating o'er the sun,
And down the hills of Appin roll'd
In many a dim and darksome fold;
The scene was mingled—shades of night
With dim, with pale, and dazzling light.

Still was the mighty ocean seen,
A boundless field of dazzling sheen;
For west the morning beam withdrew
To bask upon the shelvy blue,
And on its bosom went and came
In thousand shreds of shivery flame.

But O, between the east and north
Came moving on a veil so swarth,
—From earth to heaven one solid wave,
Like pall upon creation's grave,—
As if the Lord of Nature furl'd
Up like a scroll the smouldering world.

The virgin sovereign look'd aghast,
And ween'd each breath would be her last;
For denser grew the vapour's coil,
And backward seem'd to whirl and boil;
At length stood fix'd, from earth to sky,
A wall of gloomy ebony;
Save when long wreaths of downy grey
Turn'd their pale bosoms to the day,
Like fillets of empyrean white
Circling the funeral brow of night.

It seem'd as if the world from thence
Was sever'd by Omnipotence—
One part in light and life to bloom,
The other grope in murky gloom—
As all behind were left in wrath,
A gloomy wilderness of death,
And all before rejoice for aye
In starry night and sunshine day.

Conscious of innocence the while,
The queen look'd on that hideous veil

With awe, but yet with such an eye
As virtue turns unto the sky;
Expecting, every glance she cast,
To see forth bursting from its breast
The hail, the thunder, or the flame,
Or something without form or name.

The virgin look'd not long in vain—
The cloud began to move amain;
Inward, like whirlpool of the ocean,
It roll'd with dark and troubled motion;
And sometimes, like that ocean's foam,
Waving on its unstable home,
The silvery verges tossing by
Were swallow'd in obscurity.

Still, as it open'd on the sight,
The gauzy linings met the light;
And far within its bosom grew
A human form of face she knew;
No earthly thought it did convey,
It was not form'd like face of clay,

But in the cloudy dome was seen
Like image of a thing had been—
As if on canvass heavenly fair
A reverend face was form'd of air,
On texture of celestial land,
And pencill'd by an angel's hand.
Yet every line was there approved,
And every feature once beloved.

The silence, as she gazed, was broke—
Aloud the hoary Vision spoke;
But yet no motion it address'd;
Lip unto lip was never press'd;
It moved no feature, tongue nor eye,
Yet this it utter'd solemnly:—

"Queen of green Albyn, liest thou alone?
Look to thy honour, and look to thy throne!
The ravisher comes on his car of the wind;
The sea is before thee, the spoiler behind.
Queen of green Albyn, dare not to roam!
There's rapine approaching, and treason at home!

Trust not the sea-maid with laurel in hand;
Trust not the leopard, or woe to the land!
The falcon shall fail, and the oak of Loch-Orn,
The eagle of Mar, and the lion of Lorn;
But trust to the roe-buck with antler of grey,
In the halls of Temora, or woe to the day!"—

Up closed the cloud dark as before,
But chilling terror was not o'er:
Just where the maiden's eye was set,
Where cloud and land and ocean met,
A bull came forth, of monstrous frame,
With wreathy mane and eyes of flame;
Slowly he paw'd the yielding ground,
Then stood and madly gazed around;
His white horns flickering in the light,
Like boreal streamers o'er the night.

Soon as he fix'd his savage look
On young Queen Hynde, the mountains shook
With bellowings of unearthly tone,
As wild and furious he came on.

She tried to fly—her sight grew dim,
A numbness seized on every limb,
And nought remain'd in such a place
Save meeting danger face to face;
For she had heard that maiden's eye
Had some commanding majesty,
At which, if bold and fearless cast,
All earthly things would stand aghast.
Other expedient there was none;
Mighty the motive!—All alone
She turn'd, and with as dauntless look
As eye of beauty well might brook,
Beheld the monster as he came
Roaring and foaming on his aim.

He eyed her moveless as she stood,
And all at once, in raving mood,
Halted abash'd, and 'gan aloof
To tear the ground with horn and hoof,
Uttering such horrid sounds of wrath,
As hell had bellow'd from beneath.
The mountains caught the clamours loud,
And groan'd in echoes from the cloud.

Proud of her virtue's power display'd,
And homage by creation paid,
High glow'd the beauties kindly given
As maiden's shield by favouring Heaven;
So strong the fence, that savage fierce
Was baulk'd, and could not through it pierce.
But, mad at such a viewless toil,
He kneel'd, he grovell'd in the soil:
Shorten'd by fury, broke his roar,
Not in long bellow as before;
But with loud rending bursts of breath
He vomited forth smoke and wrath.

I've heard it said by reverend sage,—
And why should youth discredit age?—
That maiden's form, when pure and free,
Had something of divinity;
That furious ban-dog changed his eye,
And fawn'd and whined as she drew nigh;
That elfin spear, or serpent's sting,
Or pestilence on mortal wing,
To her was harmless as the dew;
That crocodile and lion knew

The virgin frame, which had a charm
They would not, or they could not harm;
That even the thunderbolt of heaven,
Pour'd in resistless liquid levin,
Would turn aside before her eye,
Or part, and fleet unhurtful by;
Because she form'd, in nature's reign,
That link of the eternal chain,
Which earth unto the heavens combined,
And angels join'd to human kind.
From worth this adage I received;
I love it, and in part believe't.

Well might Queen Hynde have stood unmoved,
Trusting a power so fairly proved:
For o'er her memory stealing came
That old and wondrous apothegm;
And she had stood, save for the eye
Of virgin's only enemy.

Across the hill, swift as the deer,
Fierce Mar approach'd, with shield and spear,

To save his beauteous sovereign bent,
And claim the due acknowledgment:
Aloud his threat and clamour grew,
Daring the savage as he flew.

Soon as the monster saw advance
The chieftain with his threatening lance,
Away he rush'd in vengeance dire,
And met him with redoubled ire.
The chieftain bawl'd and braved amain
To cow the savage, but in vain.
Onward he drove with stayless shock,
The rested lance in splinters broke,
And down to earth the chief was borne,
Struggling to ward the ruthless horn;
But all in vain!—Queen Hynde beheld
Him gored and toss'd along the field;
She saw him swathed in bloody red,
And torfell'd on the monster's head.

Appall'd and shock'd, her faith withdrew;
She turn'd, and off in horror flew;

But soon all hopes of life resign'd
As the loud bellowings near'd behind.
Upon a rough and rocky steep,
That overhangs the restless deep,
She was o'erhied, and toss'd in air—
Loud were her shrieks of wild despair:
O for the covert of the grave!
No refuge!—None at hand to save!

Maids of Dunedin, in despair
Will ye not weep and rend your hair?
Ye who, in these o'erpolish'd times,
Can shed the tear o'er woful rhymes;
O'er plot of novel sore repine,
And cry for hapless heroine—
O ye dear maids, of forms so fair,
That scarce the wandering western air
May kiss the breast so sweetly slim,
Or mould the drapery on the limb;
If in such breast a heart may be,
Sure you must weep and wail with me!

That full set eye, that peachen chin,
Bespeaks the comely void within;
But sure that vacancy is blent
With fuming, flaming sentiment!
Then can you read, ye maidens fair,
And neither weep nor rend your hair?

Think of a lady all alone—
The beauteous Hynde of Caledon—
Toss'd up the air a hideous height,
On point of blood-stain'd horn to light!
And if to wail thou canst delay,
Have thou a bard's anathema.

Still is there one resource in view—
For life one effort still is due—
It is, to plunge with desperate leap
Into the far-resounding deep,
And in the pure and yielding wave
To seek a refuge or a grave.

The leap is made, the monster foil'd,
Adown the air the virgin toil'd;

But in cold tremor crept her blood,
For far short of the yielding flood
Her fall descends with deathful blow
Sheer on the pointed rocks below.

O canst thou view the scene with me,
The scene of ruth and misery?
Yes, thou shalt go, and thou shalt view
Such scene as artist never drew.

In western lands there is a hall,
With spire, and tower, and turret tall;
And in that tower a chamber fair.—
Is that a mortal triad there?
For sure such beauty, such array,
Such moveless eye of wild dismay,
Such attitude, was never given
To being underneath the heaven.
Yes, there are two most fair, I ween,
But she whom they support between,
In symmetry of form and face,
In comely yet majestic grace,

—Statue or vision, she would seem
Chose from celestial cherubim !

Come, modellist, thy toil renew—
Such scene shall never meet thy view !
See how the raven tresses flow,
And lace that mould of purest snow ;
The night-robe from one shoulder flung,
In silken folds so careless hung ;
The face half-turn'd, the eagle eye
Fix'd rayless on the morning sky ;
That neck—that bosom, ill at rest,
White as the sea-mew's downy breast ;
And that pure lip was ne'er outdone
By rose-leaf folding to the sun.

And note that still and stedfast eye,
That look of wild sublimity,
As dawning memory wakes, the while
Soft fading to a virgin smile.
O modellist ! thy toil renew—
Such scene shall never greet thy view !

High looks that chamber o'er the sea,
And frith, and vale, and promont'ry;
From dark Cruachan pours the day,
The lattice drinks the golden ray;
And that fair form you there behold,
That statue of majestic mould,
Leaning two beauteous maids upon,
Is Hynde the Queen of Caledon!
The leap was from a couch of down,
The rest a dream for ever flown!

Maid of Dunedin, do not jeer,
Nor lift that eye with gibing fleer;
For well you wot, deny who dares,
Such are the most of woman's cares;
Nay, if I durst, I would them deem
More trivial than a morning dream.
Have I not seen thy deep distress,
Thy tears for disregarded dress,
Thy flush of pride, thy wrath intense,
For slight and casual precedence?
And I have heard thy tongue confess
Most high offence and bitterness.

Yet sooth thou still art dear to me—
These very faults I love for thee;
Then why not all my freaks allow?
I have a few, and so hast thou.

It was a dream—but it was one,
The more the virgin ponder'd on,
The deeper on her heart it fell,
Her sire's last words remembering well:—
"When danger threatens, I'll be nigh;
Therefore, my child, on dreams rely."
And she believed each incident
Was by her father's spirit sent,
To warn of treason, or of blood,
Or danger all misunderstood.

A load upon her heart it weigh'd,
And on her youthful spirits prey'd;
At length she left her royal pile,
To visit, and consult the while
Columba of the holy isle:
A seer and priest of God was he,
A saint of spotless purity;

And then held in such high regard,
That Scottish sovereign nothing dared,
Of war, religion, or of law,
Without consulting Columba.

Queen Hynde embarks in Uan bay,
Brisk was the breeze and bright the day;
Before the tide, before the gale,
The gilded barge, with silken sail,
Adown the narrow channel run,
Like meteor in the morning sun.
So swiftly swept the flying keel,
The woods and islands seem'd to wheel;
And distant peaks of freckly grey
Were winding to the north away.

The sea-gull rose as she drew nigh,
And tried before her speed to fly;
But after toilsome travelling,
With beating breast and flapping wing,
Was forced to turn aside outworn,
For shelter in the creeks of Lorn.

But Ila Glas, the minstrel grey,
Well noted, as they sped away,
That sea-fowls flock'd from isle and steep,
To view that wonder of the deep;
And well they might, for never more
Such bark shall glide from Scotland's shore.

The sailors were as chiefs bedight,
The queen and virgins all in white;
The prow was form'd in curious mould,
The top-mast stem of beaten gold;
The sails were white, the sails were blue,
And every dye the rainbow knew;
And then the pennons, red and pale,
So far were fluttering in the gale,
She was not like an earthly thing,
But some sweet meteor on the wing.
I may not say, (and if I might,
Man never has beheld the sight,)
That all were like pure angels driven
By living breeze in barge of heaven.

When westward from the sound she fell,
She met the ocean's mighty swell;
Yet bounded on in all her pride,
Breasting the billow's mountain side,
Or bearing with delirious sweep
From dizzy verge into the deep.

Maid of Dunedin, well I know,
Hadst thou been there, there had been woe!
Distress of body and of mind,
And qualms of most discourteous kind.
But here, in days of yore, were seen
Young Hynde, the Caledonian queen,
With all her maids, enjoy the motion,
Blithe as the bird that skims the ocean.
O to have been the soaring gull,
Perch'd on the headland cliff of Mull,
There to have watch'd, with raptured eye,
That royal bark go bounding by,
Casting a tiny rainbow shade
O'er every hill the ocean made!

Iona bay is gain'd at last—
The barge is moor'd, the anchor cast;
And though no woman might come nigh
That consecrated land of I,
The queen, presuming on her sway,
Went right ashore without delay.
Her sire that isle had gifted free,
And rear'd that sacred monast'ry;
The doctrine of the cross he heard,
Believed, and paid it high regard;
For he perceived that simple plan
A band 'twixt God and sinful man,
Befitting well his nature weak,
That would not loose, and could not break;
And with his child and kinsmen came,
And was baptized in Jesus' name.

When Ila Glas, in holy fane,
Announced his queen and virgin train,
Saint Oran was that very time
Giving such picture of the crime

Of woman's love and woman's art,
Of woman's mind and woman's heart!
If thou, dear maid, the same hadst heard,
Thy blissful views had all been marr'd;
For thou durst never more have been
In robe of lightsome texture seen,
Thy breast, soft-heaving with the sigh,
Arresting glance of vagrant eye!
Love's fatal and exhaustless quiver
Must have been shrouded up for ever!
The perfume—simper—look askance—
The ready blush—the ogling glance—
All, all o'erthrown, ne'er to recover!
Thy conquests and thy triumphs over!
O breathe to Heaven the grateful vow,
That good Saint Oran lives not now!

When he of such intrusion heard,
Around in holy wrath he stared:—
"What!" said the saint—"What! even here
Must these unrighteous pests appear!

Though even the rough surrounding sea
Could not protect our sanctuary;
Nor maiden modesty, nor pride,
Can keep them from where men reside,
I should have ween'd, that, thus retired,
The frame of mind the place required,
The frame of holy penitence,
Had been enough to keep them hence.

"I know them well, and much I fear
No good intent has brought them here.
E'er since that day, deplored the most,
When Adam sinn'd, and man was lost,
By woman tempted to the deed,
Mischief to man has been their meed.
Rise, holy brethren, rise with me,
And drive them back into the sea!
Should they resist, do them no harm,
But bear them back by force of arm."—

Up sprung the bearded group amain,
Who to be first each nerve they strain;

Whether to save the holy isle
From woman's snare and witching wile,
Or once again to fold the charms
Of beauty in their idle arms,
I nothing wot; but all was vain,
For, in the chancel of the fane,
Columba rose before the band,
With crosier stretch'd in his right hand.—
" Hold, my loved brethren—is it best
Thus to expel a royal guest?
We not as woman her receive,
But Scotland's representative;
And meet it is that maids should be
Tending on virgin royalty."—

That word was law—the rage was o'er,
The stern Saint Oran said no more:
He sat down on his chair of stone,
Shook his grey head, and gave a groan.

Come, view the barefoot group with me,
Kneeling upon one bended knee,

In two long piles—a lane between,
Where pass the maidens and their queen,
Up to the sacred altar stone,
Where good Columba stands alone.

There was one maiden of the train
Known by the name of Wicked Wene;
A lovely thing, of slender make,
Who mischief wrought for mischief's sake;
And never was her heart so pleased
As when a man she vex'd or teazed.
By few at court she was approved,
And yet by all too well beloved;
So dark, so powerful was her eye,
Her mien so witching and so sly,
That every youth, as she inclined,
Was mortified, reserved, or kind;
This day would curse her in disdain,
And next would sigh for Wicked Wene.

No sooner had this fairy eyed
The looks demure on either side,

Than all her spirits 'gan to play
With keen desire to work deray.
Whene'er a face she could espy
Of more than meet solemnity,
Then would she tramp his crumpled toes,
Or, with sharp fillip on the nose,
Make the poor brother start and stare,
With watery eyes and bristling hair.
And yet this wayward elf the while
Inflicted all with such a smile,
That every monk, for all his pain,
Look'd as he wish'd it done again.

Saint Oran scarce the coil could brook;
With holy anger glow'd his look;
But, judging still the imp would cease,
He knit his brows, and held his peace.

At length the little demon strode
Up to a huge dark man of God;
Her soft hand on his temple laid,
To feel how fair his pulses play'd;

Then by the beard his face she raised,
And on th' astonish'd bedesman gazed
With such enchantment, such address,
Such sly, insidious wickedness,
That, spite of insult and amaze,
Softer and softer wax'd his gaze,
Till all his stupid face was blent
With smile of awkward languishment.

Saint Oran saw—in trumpet tone,
He cried—" Satan, avoid!—begone!
Hence!—all away! for, by the rood,
Ye're fiends in form of flesh and blood!"—
Columba beckoned; all was still.
Hynde knew the mover of the ill,
And, instant turning, looked for Wene:
" I told thee, girl, and tell again,
For once remember where thou art,
And be due reverence thy part."—

Low bow'd the imp with seemly grace,
And humbly shew'd to acquiesce;

But mischief on that lip did lie,
And sly dissemblage in the eye.
Scarce had her mistress ceased to speak,
When form'd the dimple on her cheek,
And her keen glance did well bewray
Who next should fall the jackall's prey.
Saint Oran, woe be to the time
She mark'd thy purity sublime!
Oh! never was her heart so fain—
'Twas a new fund for Wicked Wene.

Meantime the queen most courteously
Address'd the seer and priest of I;
And told her latent fears at large,
Her aged father's dying charge,
And, finally, with earnest mien,
Of the late vision she had seen;
And that for counsel she had come
Thus on a pilgrimage from home.—

"Yet, reverend sires—the truth to say,
Though I have ponder'd night and day

On this strange vision—yet so toss'd
Hath been my mind, that much is lost;
And now I only can present
You with its startling lineament."—

"O!" cried Saint Oran—"here, forsooth,
Is sample fair of woman's truth!
Here she pretends to ask her lot
From dream, yet owns that dream forgot!
Out on ye all!—your whole intent
Is on some devilish purpose bent!"—

The queen was utterly astounded;
Even Saint Columba was confounded
At such outrageous frowardness;
The real cause they did not guess.

Ere that time, Wene, full silently,
Had slid up to Saint Oran's knee,
And ogled him with look so bland
That all his efforts could not stand;
Such language hung on every glance;
Such sweet provoking impudence.

At first he tried with look severe
That silent eloquence to sear,
But little ween'd the fairy's skill,
He tried what was impossible!
His flush of wrath, and glance unkind,
Were anodynes unto her mind.
Then she would look demure, and sigh,
And sink in graceful courtesy;
Press both her hands on her fair breast,
And look what could not be exprest!
When o'er his frame her glance would stray,
He wist not what to do or say!
No one perceived the elf's despight,
Nor good Saint Oran's awkward plight.
So quick the motion of her eye,
All things at once she seem'd to spy;
For Hynde, who loved her, wont to say,
For all her freaks by night and day,
Though mischief was her hourly meed,
She ne'er could catch her in the deed.
So instantly she wrought the harm,
Then, as by momentary charm,

Stood all composed, with simplest grace,
With look demure and thoughtful face,
As if unconscious of offence,
The statue of meek innocence!
Of Oran's wrath none saw the root,
The queen went on, and all were mute.—

"Now, sires, to you I have appeal'd,
To know what's nature, what reveal'd;
And that you may discern aright,
I'll tell you how I pass'd the night;
What feelings on my fancy crept,
And all my thoughts before I slept."—

"Now, for the Virgin's sake, I pray,
Spare the recital if you may!"
Cried Oran, with distemper'd mien,
And stretch'd his hands forth to the queen.
"My liege, whate'er the train denotes,
O spare the feelings and the thoughts!
We know them well—too well foresee
Their tenor and their tendency.

Heavens ! how we're bearded and belay'd !
Would that the dream itself were said !"—

Columba poignantly reproved
The rudeness of the man he loved ;
Though all were shock'd at what he said,
None saw how the poor priest was bay'd.
O Wene ! for many a wild uproar,
Much, much hast thou to answer for !

Scarce had the queen again begun,
When something Wene had look'd or done,
Enraged the saint to such excess,
He cried with desperate bitterness,
" Avoid thee, Satan !—off !—away !
Thou piece of demon-painted clay !
Thy arts are vain ! thy efforts lost !"—
All look'd astounded, Wene the most,
So sad—so sweet—so innocent,
That all supposed the queen was meant.
Between the fathers strife arose,
And words were like to end in blows.—

" Sooth !" said Saint Oran, " is it fit
That you or I should calmly sit
Listening to tale of which the theme
Is woman's thought and woman's dream ?
Out on them all !"—And forth he strode,
Groaning as one beneath a load ;
And muttering words, they heard not well,
Of limbs of Satan, sin, and hell !
Straight to his little cell he wended,
Where loud th' impassion'd prayer ascended ;
Peace was restored, and Wene was left
Of every cue to ill bereft.

Columba listen'd to the queen
With deep regard and troubled mien ;
And conscious many dreams were sent
By spirits kind and provident,
The more he thought and ponder'd o'er
That wondrous vision, still the more
He was confirm'd it did portend
Some evil wisdom might forefend ;

And he resolved to journey straight
Home with the queen th' event to wait,
For well he knew the Christian cause
Rested on Scotland's throne and laws.

The vow was seal'd, the host was laid,
The hymn was sung, the mass was said,
And after gifts of value high,
The royal Hynde withdrew from I.
Columba went her guide to be,
In rule, in truth, and purity.

They halted on the shore a while,
And ere they left the sacred isle,
Oran, with holy garments on,
Bestow'd on each his benison.
Yet all with half an eye could see,
He deem'd it did nought signify;
He seem'd as if with Heaven he strove,
And more in anger than in love.

Scarce had he said the word, *Amen*,
When petulant and pesterous Wene

Kneel'd on the sand and clasp'd his knee,
And thus address'd her earnest plea :—

" O, holy sire ! be it my meed
With thee a heavenly life to lead ;
Here do I crave to sojourn still,
A nun, or abbess, which you will ;
For much I long to taste with thee
A life of peace and purity.
Nay, think not me to drive away,
For here I am, and here I'll stay,
To teach my sex the right to scan,
And point the path of truth to man."—

" The path of truth !" Saint Oran cried,
His mouth and eyes distended wide ;
It was not said, it was not spoke,
'Twas like a groan from prison broke,
With such a burst of rushing breath,
As if the pure and holy faith
Had, by that maiden's fond intent,
Been wholly by the roots uprent.—

" The path of truth !—O God of heaven !
Be my indignant oath forgiven !
For, by thy vales of light I swear,
And all the saints that sojourn there,
If ever again a female eye,
That pole-star of iniquity,
Shed its dire influence through our fane,
In it no longer I remain.

" Were God for trial here to throw
Man's ruthless and eternal foe,
And ask with which I would contend,
I'd drive thee hence, and take the fiend !
The devil, man may hold at bay,
With book, and bead, and holy lay ;
But from the snare of woman's wile,
Her breath, and sin-uplifted smile,
No power of man may 'scape that gin,
His foe is in the soul within.

" O ! if beside the walks of men,
In green-wood glade, and mountain glen,

Rise weeds so fair to look upon,
Woe to the land of Caledon!
Its strength shall waste, its vitals burn,
And all its honours overturn.
Go, get thee from our coast away,
Thou floweret of a scorching day!
Thou art, if mien not thee belies,
A demon in an angel's guise." —

" Angels indeed!" said Lauchlan Dhu,
As from the strand the boat withdrew.
Lauchlan was he whom Wene address'd,
Whose temple her soft hand had press'd;
Whose beard she caught with flippant grace,
And smiled upon his sluggish face.
A burning sigh his bosom drew!
" Angels indeed!" said Lauchlan Dhu.—

" Lauchlan," the Father cried with heat,
" Thou art a man of thoughts unmeet!
For that same sigh, and utterance too,
Thou shalt a grievous penance do.

Angels, forsooth !—O God, I pray,
Such blooming angels keep away !"—
Lauchlan turn'd round in seeming pain,
Look'd up to heaven, and sigh'd again !

From that time forth, it doth appear,
Saint Oran's penance was severe;
He fasted, pray'd, and wept outright,
Slept on the cold stone all the night;
And then, as if for error gross,
He caused them bind him to the cross,
Unclothe his back, and, man by man,
To lash him till the red blood ran.
But then—or yet in after time,
No one could ever learn his crime;
Each keen inquiry proved in vain,
Though all supposed he dream'd of Wene.
Alas, what woes her mischief drew
On Oran and on Lauchlan Dhu !

Sweet maiden, I thy verdict claim;
Was not Saint Oran sore to blame

For so inflicting pains condign?
O think, if such a doom were thine!
Of thy day-thoughts I nothing know,
Nor of thy dreams—and were it so,
They would but speak thy guileless core,
And I should love thee still the more.
But ah! if I were scourged to be
For every time I dream of thee,
Full hardly would thy poet thrive!
Harsh is his song that's flay'd alive!
Then let us breathe the grateful vow,
That stern Saint Oran lives not now.

The sun went down, the bark went slow,
The tide was high, the wind was low;
And ere they won the Sound of Mull,
The beauteous group grew mute and dull.
Silent they lean'd against the prow,
And heard the gurgling waves below,
Playing so near with chuckling freak,
They almost ween'd it wet the cheek;
One single inch 'twixt them and death,
They wonder'd at their cordial faith!

During this silent, eiry dream,
This tedious toiling with the stream,
Old Ila Glas his harp-strings rung,
With hand elate, and puled and sung
A direful tale of woe and weir,
Of bold unearthly mountaineer;
A lay full tiresome, stale, and bare,
As most of northern ditties are:
I learn'd it from a bard of Mull,
Who deem'd it high and wonderful;
'Tis poor and vacant as the man;
I scorn to say it though I can.

Maid of Dunedin, thou may'st see,
Though long I strove to pleasure thee,
That now I've changed my timid tone,
And sing to please myself alone;
And thou wilt read, when, well I wot,
I care not whether you do or not.

Yes, I'll be querulous or boon,
Flow with the tide, change with the moon;

For what am I, or what art thou,
Or what the cloud and radiant bow,
Or what are waters, winds, and seas,
But elemental energies?
The sea must flow, the cloud descend,
The thunder burst, the rainbow bend,
Not when they would, but when they can,
Fit emblems of the soul of man!
Then let me frolic while I may,
The sportive vagrant of a day;
Yield to the impulse of the time,
Be it a toy, or theme sublime;
Wing the thin air or starry sheen,
Sport with the child upon the green;
Dive to the sea-maid's coral dome,
Or fairy's visionary home;
Sail on the whirlwind or the storm,
Or trifle with the maiden's form;
Or raise up spirits of the hill,
But only if, and when I will.

Say, may the meteor of the wild,
Nature's unstaid, erratic child,

That glimmers o'er the forest fen,
Or twinkles in the darksome glen,
Can that be bound? Can that be rein'd?
By cold ungenial rules restrain'd?
No!—leave it o'er its ample home,
The boundless wilderness, to roam!
To gleam, to tremble, and to die,
'Tis Nature's error, so am I!

Then, O forgive my wandering theme!
Pity my faults, but do not blame!
Short my advantage, small my lore,
I have one only monitor,
Whose precepts, to an ardent brain,
Can better kindle than restrain.
Then leave to all his fancies wild,
Nature's own rude untutor'd child;
And should he forfeit that fond claim,
Pity his loss, but do not blame.

Let those who list, the garden choose,
Where flowers are regular and profuse;

Come thou to dell and lonely lea,
And cull the mountain gems with me;
And sweeter blooms may be thine own,
By Nature's hand at random sown;
And sweeter strains may touch thy heart,
Than are producible by art.
The nightingale may give delight
A while, 'mid silence of the night,
But th' lark, lost in the heavens' blue,
O, her wild strain is ever new!

END OF BOOK FIRST.

QUEEN HYNDE.

BOOK SECOND.

QUEEN HYNDE.

BOOK SECOND.

When Hynde return'd to her royal hall,
With Saint Columba she withdrew,
Who told her much that would befall;
For of the future much he knew.

He solved the eagle, and the oak,
The hawk, and maiden of the sea,
(Of whom the hoary Vision spoke,)
To chiefs defined by heraldry.

But who would fight, or who would fly,
Or who their sovereign would betray,
Or what the roe-buck could imply,
With all his gifts he could not say.

But there was trouble and suspense,
For, though they knew that woe would come,
The seer could not divine from whence,
If from abroad, or rise at home.

Much sorrow woman's bosom bears
Which oft she braves with courage high;
But to that ardent soul of hers
Suspense is utter misery.

Hynde could not hunt, she could not play,
She could not revel in the ring;
She could not fast, she could not pray,
Nor yet disclose her languishing.

One day, as in her topmost tower,
Upon her lattice she reclined,
Her eyes to mountain, sea, and shore,
Roving all restless as her mind,

She spied a hind stand at her gate,
With face of mystery and despair;

But, when he came before her seat,
He told her, with a troubled air,

That fairies were to Morven come,
In thousand thousands there to dwell;
That the wild correi was their home,
Watch'd by a grisly sentinel!

That with his eyes he had them seen
In countless myriads on the hill;
Clad in their downy robes of green,
Rising and vanishing at will!

When Hynde had heard the story wild,
And saw the teller quake amain,
She look'd unto the man and smiled,
And bade him say his tale again.

Again the wondrous tale was said,
But nothing could of that be made,
It was so unallied and odd.
Again she cast her eyes abroad,

And spied on green Barcaldine lea
A horseman posting furiously:
His steed, outspent, was clotted o'er,
His neck with foam, his sides with gore;
Though great his speed, at every strain
He seem'd to eye the verdant plain
With look most haggard and aghast,
As if for spot to breathe his last;
Yet still he strain'd, leaving behind
A stream of smoke upon the wind.

The rider waved his bonnet high,
And cried aloud, as he drew nigh,
"Open your gates, and let me on—
Throw wide the gates of Beregon!
Clear—clear the way, and let me fly;
The messenger of wonder I!"—

Down dropt his steed the gate before,
His breath was spent, his efforts o'er,
While the rude herald of dismay
Cursed him, and urged on foot his way.

He saw the queen at casement high,
And " Tidings !" bawl'd with tremulous cry.—

The queen grew red—the queen grew wan,
From lattice to the door she ran ;
Then back—then hurried down the stair,
To meet that vehement messenger ;
But when his sounding step drew nigh,
She fled back to her turret high,
And, 'mid her maids, with feverish mind,
Listen'd the brown and breathless hind,
Whose habit and whose mien bespoke
A maniac from confinement broke ;
But when his accents met the ear,
They shew'd him fervent and sincere.—

" Which is the Queen of fair Scotland ?
Pardon—I need not make demand.
O haste, my liege, and raise afar
The beacon and the flag of war ;
Warn all your chiefs t' attend you here,
For high your peril is, and near.

Let this be done without delay;
And then I have a tale to say!"—

The flag of blood was raised anon,
The war-blast from the tower was blown;
The battle-whoop aloud began,
The henchmen rode, the pages ran,
The beacon which from Uock shone,
Was answered soon on Bede-na-boan,
And that from every mountain hoar,
From Melforvony to Ben-More,
Uttering afar, o'er frith and flood,
The voice of battle and of blood.

When this the peasant saw prevail,
He proffer'd to the queen his tale;
Shewing the while he had a sense
Of his own mighty consequence;
Three times he drank his thirst t' allay,
Pledging the dames in courteous way;
Thrice forth his seemly leg did shew,
And sleek'd the brown hair down his brow;

Then thus, in hurried, earnest way,
Began his wondrous tale to say.—

" Last eve upon the height I stood,
Where Ardnamurchan bays the flood;
The northern breeze sung on the tree,
Wrinkling the dark and purple sea;
Yet not a cloudlet was in view,
For heaven was deepening into blue.

" I thought I saw, without the bay,
Just in the line where Canay lay,
Somewhat that did the ocean shroud;
It seem'd a living, moving cloud
I turn'd mine eyes from off the sea,
Deeming it was some fantasy;
But still, when turning round again,
I saw that vision of the main.
Nay, once I thought white foam arose,
Rolling before unnumber'd prows.

" While thus I stood in deep surprise,
The vision vanish'd from my eyes.

But whether it melted into air,
Or sunk beneath, or linger'd there,
I could not tell, for fall of night
Shaded the spectre fleet from sight;
And, though to fear not much inclined,
A kind of terror seized my mind.
All reasoning but increased my dread,
I rose at midnight from my bed,
And heard a din upon the ocean,
As if the world had been in motion;
Voices repress'd along the shores,
And lashes from a thousand oars.

"I heard them—yet confess I must,
I scarcely could my senses trust,
But deem'd some trouble sway'd my blood,
Or on enchanted ground I stood;
For all was calm at break of day,
Nor ship nor boat was in the bay.
Along the shore and heathy hill
No whisper moved, save from the rill;
Yet I could note the roaming deer
Turn from that mountain's side in fear;

No snowy flocks were straggling there,
The kid had left its wonted lair,
And the dull heifer paused to gaze,
And ruminate in deep amaze.

" From what I saw at even-tide,
I deem'd that something there did hide ;
If so, I knew all was not well,
But how, or why, I could not tell.
So I resolved my life to stake,
For my fair queen and country's sake

" I clothed me in this fool's array,
I launch'd my shallop in the bay ;
I cross'd Loch-Sunart to the east,
And stray'd along the mountain's breast
Jabbering and singing as I went,
Like idiot mean and indigent.

" At first one warrior cross'd my way,
Resting his lance to make me stay ;
A man he was of rugged mien,
Such arms or robes I ne'er had seen.

My hands were clasp'd my back behind,
My eyes wide open to the wind,
I did not once these hands divide,
But with my elbow turn'd aside
His lance, with wide, unalter'd stare,
As if such man had not been there.
Rough words he spoke in unknown tongue,
But still I jabber'd and I sung,
And onward pass'd, resolved to spy
The mystery out, though doom'd to die.
The warrior smiled, and laid him down;
I saunter'd, sung, and wander'd on.

" At length an armed file I spied,
Hid in the heath all side by side!
I made no motion of surprise,
But trudged, and sung, in idiot wise;
Then stretch'd me down amid the throng,
And pull'd the grass, and croon'd my song.
They seem'd amused, and smiled to see
My deep, unmoved stupidity.
My ears on all their accents hung,
But all was in an unknown tongue.

" I next went to a rising ground,
Where I could see all round and round,
And utter'd such a horrid yell,
That rocks and hills rang out the knell.
But never since I view'd the day,
Saw I such vision of dismay!
Thousands of warriors, grim and swarth,
Upraised their heads out of the earth;
Then softly, like a fairy scene,
They crept into the earth again;
Each brake was lined, above the strand,
With warriors of a foreign land.

" This brought me many an angry look,
And chastisement, and stern rebuke;
I bore them all full patiently,
And 'scaped to bring the word to thee.
O'er Morven hills I ran with speed,
I swam the Coran on my steed,
And I have ridden the Appin o'er
As never mortal rode before.
This is my tale, I vouch it true;
Much it imports, my liege, to you;

The foe is strong, the danger nigh ;
My steed I've lost ! and here am I."—

" If that be truth," Queen Hynde replied,
" A truth in nothing falsified,
Of thy lost steed have no regard,
For ample shall be thy reward,
In gifted lands and honours high,
For thou hast acted gallantly :
If false, then of thyself take heed,
The highest tree shall be thy meed.
To prove thee honest as thou seem'st,
Say all thou saw'st, and all thou deem'st."—

" I've braved the Briton on the field,
I've met the Roman shield to shield ;
Of many a foe I've seen the face ;
But such a rough and warlike race
As they who lie on Morven's shore,
In sooth, I ne'er beheld before.

" If there are nations north away,
As I have heard old minstrels say,

Who live by land, or live by sea,
As suits the time or casualty ;
Who o'er the wave, on summer tide,
Along the wastes of ocean glide,
Or in the deep indented bay,
Like pellochs, dive to pick their prey ;
And when the seasons 'gin to turn,
Amid the forests far sojourn,
Hunting the great deer to and fro,
Or burrowing, 'neath eternal snow,
Deep in the bowels of the ground ;
With their unlovesome mates around,
Howling the songs of other spheres,
And feasting on lank wolves and bears ;—
If such there are, a countless host
Of such now lies on Scotland's coast :
For all their robes are from the wood,
Or seal-skin of the northern flood ;
Their beards are long, their arms unclean,
Their food the hateful haberdine.

" Farther I saw that to the sea
Their eyes reverted constantly ;

There still they look'd, as if aware
That all their hopes were anchor'd there;
And thence, I judge, from Barra's shore,
This night will bring as many more;
And that, before the break of day,
Their fleet may ride in Creran bay.

"Nay, more, I dread that to their side
Some Scots have turn'd, and been their guide;
For not in all our western bound
Could such a landing-place be found;
Such solitude in bay and hill,
So deep, so lonely, and so still.

"One passenger, while I was there,
Came up the shore with lightsome air;
He sung, he whistled, and he ran;
I deem'd him one of Moidart's clan.
But as he pass'd, with luckless eye,
He saw the beach all trodden lie;
He mark'd the footsteps and stood still,
Look'd to the sea, and to the hill,

Still lingering on the tainted brink,
As if he wist not what to think.

" A chief arose, with ill intent,
Out of the brake, and to him went;
And with one stroke and little din
Clove the poor traveller to the chin,
Then hid him in the clustering brake.
O how my heart began to quake!
I thought of death, and 'gan to con
The prayer that would be soonest done.
I 'scaped them all, though sore beset!
In artifice I ne'er was beat.
None else could thus have caution'd you,
Though I, who should not say it, do."—

O when that hind aside had laid
His fool's attire, and was array'd
In belted plaid and broad claymore,
And robes which once a chieftain wore;
And came, with martial cap in hand,
Before the nobles of the land,

It would have joy'd your heart to've seen
His face of wisdom and his mien.
And aye he stretch'd with careful fold
His philabeg of tassell'd gold,
And tried with both hands to sleek down
His locks all weatherbeat and brown;
Then quite bewilder'd every sense
With words of great magnificence:
The motley clown I do not blame,
Few are his paths that lead to fame!
One gain'd, let him that path pursue,
For great and glorious is the view!

High on a rock the palace stood,
Looking afar o'er vale and flood,
Amid a mighty citadel,
To force of man impregnable.
Seven towers it had of ample space,
Which still the stranger well may trace.
Much famed in legendary lore,
'Twas Selma in the days of yore,
But east and north the city lay,
On ridge and vale, from bay to bay,

And many a stately building shone
Within the ancient Beregon,
And many a fair and comely breast
Heaved in that jewel of the west.
While round it cliffs and walls arose
Impassable to friends and foes.

The Caledonians lay at ease,
Beleaguer'd by their hills and seas,
They knew no force by land could won
Their old imperial Beregon;
But hostile navies were their dread,
To which a thousand bays were spread,
Round every peopled vale and hill,
Where they might ravage at their will;
And never news so fraught with fear
Had met the Caledonian's ear.

Benderiloch and Appin men,
From Etive bay, to Cona glen,
Led by old Connal of Lismore,
Appear'd the first on Creran shore.

Gillian of Lorn, at close of eve,
Cross'd over Connel's boisterous wave,
With seven score yeomen in his train,
Well baited on the battle-plain.
All these, with other armed men,
Knight, squire, and serf, and citizen,
Assembled were at evening fall,
Scarcely a thousand men in all.
But where the watch to keep o'er night;
Or where the danger would alight;
What foe was nigh, or what would be,
All was in dim uncertainty.

On every height and headland steep,
Wardens were placed the watch to keep,
By shores of Appin and of Lorn,
With pipe, and call, and bugle-horn,
In various notes to give alarms
To warriors resting on their arms.

The autumn eve closed on the hill;
The north was breathing brisk and chill;

The stars were sprinkled o'er the night,
With goggling and uncertain light,
As if eventful watch to keep,
Over these reavers of the deep.
What with the roar of Connel's stream;
The cormorant's awakening scream;
The constant whistling of the gale;
The dead-lights glimmering in the dale;
The shadowy mountains, bored and riven,
That seem'd to gap the eastern heaven;
It was by sages truly hight,
An ominous and awful night!

High beat the heart of many a maid,
And many an ear was open laid,
Deep list'ning, with suspended breath,
To hear the signal sound of death.
Each casual clang, and breathing boom,
And voice that wander'd through the gloom,
Sent to the heart a thrilling knell.
And when the morrow's sentinel,
The cock, his midnight 'larum crew,
A thousand cheeks were changed of hue;

Ten thousand heads, stunn'd and amazed,
Were from green moss and pillow raised.

The midnight came, and pass'd away,
And silence hung o'er keep and bay;
Save that three watchers, on Loch-Linhe,
Above Glen-Hendal's groves of pine,—
Just in the midnight's deepest reign,
When Orion with his golden chain
Had measured from the moors of Tay
To keystone of the milky way,—
Heard a soft lay of sorrow given,
Somewhere from out the skirts of heaven,
Much like the funeral song of pain
Which minstrel pours o'er warrior slain,
And well the strains, to sorrow true,
Of Ossian's airy harp they knew,
Which his rapt spirit from the sky,
Gave to the breeze that journey'd by;
As well they knew the omen drear
Boded of danger, death, and weir.

The first watch of the morning past,
Dark was the shade o'er nature cast;
And o'er the eyes that watch had kept,
The short and dreamy slumber crept;
When, all at once, from sentinel,
Burst on the air the bugle's swell!
And never did note from bugle blown
Congeal so many hearts to stone!

If thou did'st e'er the affliction bear
Of having all thou valued'st here
Placed in a frail and feeble bark,
Exposed upon the ocean dark;
And when thy spirit yearn'd the most,
The word arrived that all was lost,
Then may'st thou guess the pains that stole
Cold on the Caledonian's soul.

Unto the first alarm that broke,
No answer came, save from the rock,
For all sat list'ning in suspense,
And doubting every mortal sense;

But soon repeated was the roar,
Longer and louder than before.

Then one o'erwhelming flood of sound
Burst over Scotland round and round;
Away, away! by mountain hoar,
By moated peel, by isle, and shore,
Far eastward to the break of morn,
And o'er the thousand glens of Lorn:
Slow down the links of Spey it flew,
On Lomond waked the slumbering mew,
Till down Cantire, with rolling sweep,
It died along the southern deep.

The matron said her holiest prayer;
The household dog rose from his lair,
Turn'd up his snout, and howl'd amain;
The fox and eagle join'd the strain;
The capperkailzie scorn'd to flee,
But gallow'd on the forest tree;
The hill-wolf turn'd him to the wind,
And lick'd his bloody flew, and whined.

How shook the foemen at the noise,
They deem'd it was the land of voice!

By every mountain, lake, and glen,
By forest, frith, and shaking fen,
Came rows of men in arms bedight,
Panting and hurrying through the night.
And aye as from the mountain's head,
Beside the bealfire blazing red,
The watcher's warning note was blown,
Faster they strode, and posted on.
Yet all those lines afar and near
Straight inward to one goal did steer,
As to the lake the streamlets run,
Or rays point to the morning sun;
Or like the lines of silvery foam
Around the ocean's awful tomb,
Where grim Lofodden's thirsty cave
Swallows adown the living wave;
Around, around the whirlpool's brink,
To that they point, and run, and sink.
So pour'd the warriors of the land,
Around their queen and throne to stand;

Too late they came ! ere rose the sun,
The bloody fight was lost and won !

Where sounded first the watcher's horn,
Rush'd to the shore the men of Lorn,
And saw, as to the strand they press'd,
Upon the ocean's groaning breast,
As if the forest of Lismore
Came struggling on to Appin's shore.
So far that moving wood was spread,
The sound so wholly covered,
That all along its level sheen
No image of a star was seen :
Such fleet no Scot had ever hail'd,
Nor e'er on Albyn's seas had sail'd.

Onward it came like moving wood,
Loaded, and lipping with the flood,
Till every keel refused the oar,
And, stranded, lean'd on Appin shore :
Each warrior there had pledged his faith,
To win a home for life or death.

The barks were moor'd all side by side,
Then plunged the warriors in the tide.—
" Now !" cried old Connal, in a tone
Of ecstasy—" on, warriors, on !"—
And as the hail-cloud hanging swarth
Bursts with the thunder on the earth,
So rush'd on death our warriors brave,
With shout that deaden'd every wave.
The plunge of horses, and the neigh,
The broken and uncertain bay,
Where floundering warriors fought and fell,
The utter darkness, and the knell
Of battle still that louder grew,
The flashes from the swords that flew,
Form'd altogether such a scene
As warriors scarce shall view again !

In sooth, when first these warriors met,
When every sword to sword was set,
You would have ween'd some meteor's ray,
Or curve of flame, hung o'er the bay,
So flew the fire from weapons keen,

While all was noise and rage between,
But nothing save that fire was seen.

Where Lorn with his brave horsemen came,
The coast was firm, the beach the same;
But where the galleys lay, they knew
Abrupt and deep at once it grew.
Into the wave they rode amain,
The foe withstood them, but in vain;
They drove them backward in the strife,
To plunge amid their ships for life.
But too intrepid in their wrath,
And too intent on foemen's death,
Over the beach, into the deep,
They rush'd like flock of weetless sheep,
That headlong plunge, with flurried mind,
While dogs and shepherds whoop behind;
Or like the cumbrous herd that goes,
Of panting, thirsting buffaloes,
From deep Missouri's wave to drink;
Fast press they to the stayless brink,
Pushing the foremost from the shore,
Till thousands sink to rise no more:

So plunged our yeomen over head,
Till scarce a remnant turn'd and fled,
While rock'd the galleys to and fro,
With struggling, parting life below.

This error Muse may scarce define,
A breach was made in Scotia's line;
The foe in thousands gain'd the strand,
And stretch'd in files to either hand,
So that the footmen were beset,
Who still the foe had backward beat;
For when they first met in the sea,
They scarcely fought unto the knee;
Now all the waving crescent line,
Toil'd to the breasts in smoking brine,
Which round them thick and clammy grew,
A waveless tide of crimson hue;
But still they fought, though coil'd in gore,
With foes behind, and foes before.
No son of Albyn held at ought
His life, or harbour'd once a thought
That on his coast might step a foe,
Who first not o'er his breast should go.

Their perilous case hid from their view,
Amid the morning's murky hue,
Each warrior fought for country's sake,
As if his all had been at stake,
As if the safety of the land
Lay in the force of his right hand.
No groan of hero's death could tell,
As 'mid the thickening wave they fell;
Warriors on shivering warriors stood,
Choked in that tide of briny blood.

O, when the sun, through morning rime,
Look'd over Cana's cliffs sublime,
Never on Appin's shore was spread
Such piles of blench'd and mangled dead!
The tide, receding, left a stain
Of crimson ever to remain,
(For since that day no tempest's shock
Can bleach the colour from the rock,)
And left, in woful guise the while,
Troops of pale warriors, rank and file,
Stretch'd on the strand, in lines uneven,
With their cold eye-balls fix'd on heaven!

Their bodies swathed in bloody foam,
Their heads turn'd to their native home.

And every corse of Albyn's race,
Had marks of gloom in his dead face,
As still for life and force he gasp'd,
And in his hand his sword was grasp'd.
Each visage seem'd to interchange
With others grin of stern revenge;
But nigher view'd, it wore an air
Of gloom, of sorrow, and despair.
As the last feelings of the heart
Had been a pang of grief to part
From Caledon when needed most,
And that his powerful aid was lost.

Columba, with his sovereign fair,
Had spent the latter hours in prayer,
E'er since the time the bugle rung,
And many a holy hymn they sung.
They never knew till break of day,
That Scotia's host had waned away;

They knew of battle on the coast,
But little ween'd that all was lost.
And when the morning's purple beam
On Beregon began to gleam,
O, what a scene for sovereign's eye,
Was open'd slow and gradually!
The bay all fringed with glistening gore,
The human wreck along the shore;
A thousand masts, from bark and barge,
Pointing to the horizon's verge;
For all around the Keila bay
The fleet was moor'd, and leaning lay;
And dreadful hosts of warriors grim
The plains beyond the gate bedim;
All crowding, gathering, bearing on
To hapless, hopeless Beregon!

Old Connal Bawn, and wounded Lorn,
With handful of brave men outworn,
Borne, inch by inch, back from the strand,
Now took their last and latest stand
Within the porch, with full intent
To fall, or entrance there prevent.

Too plain it was that all was lost,
But what astounded Hynde the most,
Was the broad banner of the foe,
High streaming on the morning's brow;
For on it flash'd, in dreadful wise,
A sable bull of monstrous size,
His horns, his colour, and his frame,
His furious mood the very same
As that, remember'd still with awe,
Which in her hideous dream she saw.
The close of that when she thought on,
Her heart grew cold, and turn'd to stone!

She saw a foresight had been given
To her of future things by Heaven;
But yet so shadowy and so dim,
On reason's surf it seem'd to swim,
And all the struggling of the mind,
Its form and substance could not find.
But plain it was to every sense,
That some sublime intelligence,
Beyond the power of mind to scan,
Existed between God and man.

Distemper'd thoughts her bosom stirr'd,
Her father's words again recurr'd:
And ah! the thought that there could be
A thing of immortality,
A spirit that had pass'd away,
Of one in dust and death that lay
Still by her side, to smile, or frown,
Converse, and mingle with her own,
Was one so deeply ponder'd on
That reason waver'd on her throne.

Message on message posting came,
Which so perplex'd the youthful dame,
That all her mind's exertion fled,
A stupor on her brain was shed.
Her royal city of command,
The great emporium of the land,
She saw exposed to foemen's ire,
To sword, to ravage, and to fire.
Her nobles gone to fetch supply,
One leader wounded mortally,
The other brave, but hard beset,
Herself, with holy anchoret,

Surrounded by a ruthless foe;
Alas! what could the virgin do?
No human stay or succour near,
She look'd to heaven, and dropt a tear!—

"My honour'd liege," Columba said,
"Suffer your servant, thus array'd,
Forth to the foe in peace to fare,
And learn from whence, and who they are;
Their purpose, and their dire intent,
And why on war with maiden bent.
We haply thus may stay the war,
Till Lennox come, and rapid Mar;
I'll wend unaided and alone,
For every tongue to me is known."—
The queen approved the wise appeal,
And lauded high his honest zeal.

Forth stepp'd the sire the hosts between,
Bearing a bough of holly green;
The marshall'd foe his journey sped,
And to their king the seer was led.

A prince he seem'd of courage high,
Of mighty frame and lion eye,
With something generous in his face,
A shade of noble courteousness,
Mix'd with a stern and jealous part,
Th' effect of caution, not of heart;
And by him stood a prince most fair,
Haco, his sister's son and heir.

Before the king Columba stood,
Nor bow'd he head, nor lifted hood;
Erect he stood with tranquil ease,
Looking the monarch in the face,
Loth to avale, if it might be,
One jot of Scotland's dignity;
And lother still to bring the blame
Of cringing on the Christian name:
Serene he stood, like one prepared
To answer, rather than be heard.

One surly glance the monarch threw
But momently that glance withdrew,

For well his eye had learn'd to trace
The human soul from human face.
But such a face, and such an eye
Of tranquil equanimity,
He had not view'd in all his reign
O'er Scania's stormy, wild domain;
'Mong all the dark and stern compeers
Of Odin's rueful worshippers.—

"Who art thou that, in such array,
With cowled head, and frock of grey,
Approachest on unbending knee
The face of sovereign majesty?"—

"I wist not, king, to whom I came,
What rank he claim'd, or what his name,
Else I had render'd honours due,
For to th' awards of Heaven I bow;
And well I know the mighty Hand
That rules the ocean and the land,
O'er mankind, his peculiar care,
Places the sovereign powers that are;

If such thou art, I'll honours pay;
But first thy name and lineage say.
That thus thou comest, in armour sheen,
Against a young and virgin queen."—

" As suits you, friend or foe, I am,
Eric of Norway is my name;
My lineage is supreme and high,
Of Odin's race that rules the sky;
All Scandinavia owns my reign,
From Finmark to the northern main;
My errand is, I frankly own,
To win your queen, and wear your crown;
That all the northern world may be
One huge, resistless monarchy.
If young Queen Hynde, of fair renown,
Will yield to me herself and crown,
Our flag of war shall soon be furl'd,
I'll make her mistress of the world;
If not, to me it seems as nought,
I'll take her, and her land to boot.
I and my warriors value less
Your forces than one bitter mess;

I'll crush them like a moth, and must
Lay ancient Beregon in dust;
My soldiers' prey it needs must be,
Though I regret it grievously.

"Go, tell your queen I proffer her
My hand, my love, my crown to wear;
And would she save her hand from scathe,
Her warriors and her chiefs from death,
Her maids from brunt of rude desire,
Her capital from sword and fire,
Let her be sure her choice to make,
Of that perforce she needs must take.
Eric of Norway is not wont
Of deeds he cannot do to vaunt."—

"Forsooth, King Eric, I must say,
Such wooer comes not every day,
So frank to ask, and free to give,
So downright, and so positive;
So brief a courtship ne'er was known
Within the bounds of Caledon.

How it may end I little wot,
But the beginning has been hot;
And hence, I pray that God may keep
Such northern wooers north the deep.

" However, I shall well agree,
I not dislike your policy;
For should your high designs succeed,
The holy faith it needs must spread.
As ghostly counsellor, and guide,
And messenger of Heaven beside,
I may not, and I will not, cease
To cultivate eternal peace.
But should—as 'tis my firm belief,
Her troth be pledged to Scottish chief,
What then remains?—She can't revoke;
A sovereign's word may not be broke."—

" Let arms decide the right," said he;
" The sword be judge 'twixt him and me."—
This said he in so stern a tone,
The saint stood mute, reply was none.

" Whoe'er thou art," the king rejoin'd,
" As vicar of the royal Hynde,
I thee respect, and make appeal
If I not fair and frankly deal.
My sovereignty I lay aside,
From subject wight to win my bride;
If vanquish'd, I request no more,
I yield her to the conqueror:
Better one man than thousands die;
Thou hast my answer;—homeward hie;
If not ere noon assent returns,
You yield perforce, your city burns;
I'll leave nor pile, nor standing stone,
In all your boasted Beregon."—

" Most gallant sovereign, I implore
One other word, and then no more—
What if my queen have pledged her troth,
By royal word or solemn oath,
To sundry chiefs, in their degrees
Bound to particular services,
And he that most avails the land,
To share her throne, and win her hand?—

I pledge no word that this I know,
But, sooth, I deem and judge it so."—

" Then bring them all," King Eric cried—
" Bring one, bring two upon your side—
Princes or peasants let them be—
Bring ten—it is the same to me!
Men to your men I will produce,
If Hynde from 'mong the victors choose."—

" In thee, King Eric, I perceive
A noble foe or friend we have:
Forthwith before my queen I'll lay
Your gallant suit, for yea or nay."—

Much was the stir, when this was known
In palace of old Beregon.
Sore they demurr'd, yet it did seem
A respite in a great extreme—
A respite from a deadening blow
By an o'erpowering reckless foe.
Proud Gaul of Ross, and lordly Mar,
And Donald Gorm, were distant far;

For Sutherland they look'd in vain
From verges of the northern main;
Lochorn was nigh, and Allan Bane,
Lochaber's fair and goodly thane,
But all uncertain was their power;
Argyle was look'd for every hour,
And when he came to aid the war,
They knew that neither he, nor Mar,
Nor any Scottish chief, would bear
King Eric's brag in deeds of weir.
They ween'd that warriors there were none
Could match the chiefs of Caledon;
Yet such a stake as queen and crown
On such a die was never known.

While thus they sat in counsel slow,
And wist not how or what to do—
While fears were high, and feelings strong,
While words were few, and pauses long—
Queen Hynde, from off her royal seat,
Thus spoke in words and mood elate:—

" My ancient friends, full well I see
Your kind concern and fears for me;
No more your risk, no more your stake,
Than Albyn chooses that to make.
I'm a mere woman—and my crown,
With your support, is great, I own;
Without it, 'tis but sordid dust—
Let Eric take us, if he must!
Though both are won, and I constrain'd,
The soul of Albyn is not chain'd;
By hard constraint whate'er I do,
Be to your independence true.

" I'm great or small at your behest—
A queen, a trifle, or a jest;
I rule because you will it so,
No more can mighty Eric do.
I take his offer—three to three
His claim shall straight decided be:
From out the number that subdues,
My husband and my lord I choose.

" Were there a dread—as there is none—
That chosen chiefs of Caledon
Can e'er to barbarous foemen yield,
Or fainting quit the combat field,
Then let King Eric take his all—
His queen and kingdom nominal!

" Whereas, should we this pause forego,
And baulk a proud and powerful foe,
Our wealth and crown, ere falls the night,
Must yield to his resistless might.
I take his offer without dread;
Be this proviso only made,
That, as a queen and crown may go
From nation by a single blow,
Whoever wins, on yonder plain
In seven days shall fight again:
That day shall all decisive be—
The victor's gain, my crown and me.
But, in the interim, I shall claim,
In whose soever power I am,
Such honours, deference, and esteem,
As may a virgin queen beseem."—

Consent was full, applause was high,
For why, no better meed was nigh.
Columba and old Connal went
Forth to King Eric's royal tent,
Which now a wonder rose to view,
Spangled with furs of every hue.
The clause was joyfully approved,
For Eric blood and battery loved.
The day was set, the hour, the field,
The brief agreement sign'd and seal'd,
And all the Norse to music's tone
Enter'd the gates of Beregon.
Friendly they were, and madly gay,
And, sooth, such revel and deray,
Such wassailing and noiance vast,
Had not been seen for ages past.
The maids of Beregon were pleased,
For they were flatter'd, woo'd, and teazed;
And well 'tis known that woman's mind
Is still to noise and stir inclined;
She would be mark'd, and woo'd withal,
Rather to ill than not at all.

Ah! lovëliest of the lovely throng!
Why darts that frown my page along?
If I from courtesy have swerved,
I may be blamed, and may deserve't;
I oft have been, and oft will be—
It may not, shall not, be by thee.

Why should I tell of that I rue,
Or sing, deluded flowers, of you?
Of seven fair sisters in a bower,
Each lovelier than the opening flower,
Chaste as the snow of winter storms,
Or stream that bathed their lovely forms
And they were pure as they were fair—
So deem'd we all—and so they were.
The spoilers came—their toils were few!
How can I sing of that I rue?

O, I have thought, and thought again,
And still the memory gives me pain!
Nor can I deem that beauty's glow,
The liquid eye, and radiant brow,

The smile that, like the morning dew,
Sheds gladness on the gazer's view—
The graceful form, the gliding tread,
Too light to bruise the daisy's head—
The downy locks, with roses twined,
Or wanton waving in the wind—
The mantling blush so sweetly spread,
Changing the pale rose to the red—
All but a gloss in kindness given
To woman's youth by pitying Heaven,
For glories lost by primal sin,
To veil unsanctitude within!

O that such thoughts I could consign
To darkness distant and condign!
If broods the soul on such alloy,
Then where is mine and nature's joy?
Still let me love thee as thou art,
Though passions rankle at thy heart;
Though chroniclers point thee for ill,
I'll ween thee pure and gentle still:
I'll say, when thousand faults combine,
My sex has dross as well as thine;

And in my last and utmost need,
I'll fly to Calvin's sweeping creed,
And say of crimes of deepest hue,
They were predestined thee to do
Ere thou wast born, though thine the ill—
What is our lot we must fulfil!

Nay, rather than to thousands yield,
Or fly defeated from the field,
I'll quit this jointured age and thee—
This age of bond and bankruptcy—
With all its sordid thirst of gold,
And conjure up the times of old;
Raising from ancient days a queen,
And maids that were, or might have been,
That I may mould them as I will,
And love thee, froward trifler, still.
Only—though light I hold thy jeer—
None of thy pruding let me hear:
I know thee well—too well to feign,
And have my way, as thou hast thine.

If bards and maids must disagree,
Woe to the fair !—and woe to me !

I've sung of wake and roundelay,
In beauteous Mary's early day ;
Of charms that could all hearts command ;
Of maiden borne to fairy land ;
Of worlds of love, and virgins bright ;
Of pilgrims to the land of light.
And I have sung to those who know
Of maiden's guilt and failings too ;
And all in love, to paint to thee
The charms of perfect purity.

Now I've call'd forth a patriot queen
Of generous soul and courtly mien ;
And I've upraised a wayward elf
With faults and foibles like thyself ;
And these as women thou shalt see,
More as they are, than they should be.
Then wrangle not with one whose skill
Is short and laggard to his will ;

Who yet can hope, and brow the heaven,
Of God and man to be forgiven
For every strain he dared essay,
For every line of every lay,
That would to purity impart
One stain, or wound the virtuous heart.

END OF BOOK SECOND.

QUEEN HYNDE.

BOOK THIRD.

QUEEN HYNDE.

BOOK THIRD.

WHOE'ER in future time shall stray
O'er these wild valleys west away,
Where first, by many a trackless strand,
The Caledonian held command;
Where ancient Lorn, from northern shores
Of Clyde to where Glen-Connel roars,
Presents in frowning majesty
Her thousand headlands to the sea:
O, traveller! whomsoe'er thou art,
Turn not aside, with timid heart,
At Connel's tide, but journey on
To the old site of Beregon;

I pledge my word, whether thou lovest
The poet's tale, or disapprovest,
So short, so easy is the way,
The scene shall well thy pains repay.
There shalt thou view, on rock sublime,
The ruins grey of early time,
Where, frowning o'er the foamy flood,
The mighty halls of Selma stood.
And mark a valley stretching wide,
Inwall'd by cliffs on either side,
By curving shore, where billows broke,
And triple wall, from rock to rock;
Low in that strait, from bay to bay,
The ancient Beregonium lay.

Old Beregon! what soul so tame
Of Scot that warms not at thy name?
Or where the bard, of northern clime,
That loves not songs of Selma's time?
Yes, while so many legends tell,
Of deeds, and woes, that there befell,
These ruins shall be dear to fame,
And brook the loved, the sacred name.

Nay, look around, on green-sea wave,
On cliff, and shelve, which breakers lave;
On stately towers and ruins grey,
On moat, on island, glen, and bay;
On remnants of the forest pine,
Old tenants of that mountain reign;
On cataract and shaggy mound,
On mighty mountains far around
Jura's fair bosom, form'd and full;
The dark and shapeless groups of Mull;
Others far north, in haze that sink,
Proud Nevis, on Lochaber's brink,
And blue Cruachan, bold and riven,
In everlasting coil with heaven.
View all the scene, and view it well,
Consult thy memory, and tell
If on the earth exists the same,
Or one so well deserves the name.*

---

* *Selma* signifies The Beautiful View; *Beregon*, or *Perecon*, as it is pronounced, The Serpent of the Strait.

Thou still may'st see, on looking round,
That, saving from the northern bound,
Where stretch'd the suburbs to the muir,
The city stood from foes secure.
North on Bornean height was placed
King Eric's camp, o'er heathery waste;
And on Barvulen ridge behind,
Rock'd his pavilion to the wind,
Where royal banners, floating high
Like meteors, stream'd along the sky.

Within the palace he had been,
And converse held with Scotland's queen;
And the north tower, of strong defence,
Was given him for his residence.
There over-night he would not stay,
But there he sojourn'd day by day;
For, sooth to say, as well he might,
King Eric was in woful plight;
For ne'er was heart of rosy maid,
Nor amorous youth, nor dotard, laid
So wholly under love's arrest,
As was King Eric's noble breast.

Queen Hynde was his perpetual theme,
His hourly thought, his nightly dream;
And no discourse could chance to be
Of war, or peace, or policy,
In which, with fondness archly seen,
He introduced not Albyn's queen.
It was a theme beloved so well,
He long'd, and loved on it to dwell.

She met him, but his presence thence
She shunn'd, as not to give offence;
She had no thought, no pride, no aim,
But what her country's rights became;
And in the converse them between,
Such majesty was in her mien,
Such dignity with sweetness mix'd,
The soul of Eric was transfix'd;
From former, ruder joys estranged,
His very nature seem'd exchanged.

The comeliest youth of northern name,
Prince Haco, mark'd the growing flame,

And wild impatience fired his mind,
To see that fair, that wondrous Hynde,
That thus could raise in warrior's core,
Feelings unknown, unfelt before.
Oft watch'd he round the tower alone,
But word or intercourse was none,
Till, feigning tale of import high,
He gain'd admittance artfully.
Hynde to Columba's aisle had gone,
An hour with him to spend alone,
Just as the prince was introduced
As messenger of secret trust.

By wayward chance it happ'd just then,
That frolicsome and restless Wene,
In all the royal robes of state
Array'd, on throne of ivory sate,
Aping a queen with such a face,
Such majesty, and proud grimace,
That all the noble maids around
With laughter sunk upon the ground.
One personated haughty Mar,
One Norway's boist'rous brand of war,

One Allan Bane, one Coulan Brande,
And one the Lord of Sutherland;
And each address'd the suit to Wene,
In wooer terms, as Scotland's queen.

To one the imp, with simpering grin,
Turn'd up her nose, and tiny chin;
Her scarf of tissued gold flung by;
And raised her shapely arm on high,
Saying, in act, most gracefully,
" Have done, good friend! I'll none of thee!"—
Another she apart would eye,
With piercing glance, or ogle sly;
Another flatter—then again
Turn to King Eric of the main;
And all the patriot queen display,
In dignified and generous way.

While this high game was at the height,
And all were wrapt in wild delight,
A gentle rap was at the door;
" Come in," said Wene; and on the floor

A bowing page these words address'd,
" A messenger in speechless haste
From royal Eric craves thine ear."—
" 'Tis well," said Wene; " let him appear
Before OUR throne."—These words she said
So like the queen, the page obey'd.
Each maid look'd to the throne on high
With dimpling cheek and pregnant eye,
And scarce from laughter could refrain
At the effrontery of Wene;
But dreading sore that such a jest
Would lead to scorn and wrath at least.

No time was now these fears to state,
To reason, or expostulate;
For, momently, in royal hall,
Prince Haco bow'd amid them all.
His courtly form so tall and fair,
His flowing curls of flaxen hair,
His amorous look, and princely gear,
Soon made him general favourite there.—

" Pardon, illustrious queen," he cried,
" Flower of the world, and Albyn's pride,
For this intrusion on your court:
I tidings bring of strange report;
Haco's my name, King Eric's heir,
My message suits your private ear."—

With sovereign air, and motion dumb,
Wene pointed with her queenly thumb
Unto the door—then, in a tone
Soft yet majestic, cried " Begone,
We wish with him to be alone;
Shortly your counsels we may crave;
To Scotland's weal we are the slave."—
Forth stepp'd the dames with curtsey low;
To each the prince return'd a bow;
But as the hindmost disappear'd,
A tittering sound of mirth he heard,
And in his brilliant eye was blent
Shame, anger, and astonishment.—

" Regard not, prince, a court-dame's fleer,
To you they mean no scoff or jeer;

'Tis at their mistress and their queen,
And she must bear't," said wicked Wene.
" Prince, when misfortune's at the door,
It looses tongues were mute before.
They jeer that thus their queen should be
In hall alone with prince like thee;
Nor is it meet—but I must bow
To things unfitting virgin now."—

" And, sooth," said Haco, " much I fear
The queen will turn on me the jeer,
When she shall hear, as now she must,
My message of important trust.
Forgive thy servant, I entreat,
'Tis love that brings me to thy feet;
To see thy face, thy words to hear,
Was the intent that brought me here."—

" Love!" said the urchin, with a frown
Such as from eye was never thrown—
" Love darest thou name to Albyn's queen,
Whose face before thou hast not seen?

Such theme WE list not to discuss;
WE must not yet be toy'd with thus."—

" Forgive my youth, angelic dame,
And glowing heart of moulded flame;
Thou shalt not need one word to check,
Nor hear aught but with due respect.
I've set my head upon a die,
To pay this homage to thine eye;
For of thy form of matchless grace,
Thy cherub eye, and lovely face,
So much I heard, that heavenly bliss
Seem'd less to me than hour like this;
But all was short that I heard told,
To beauty that I now behold."—

I've said before, and must repeat,
That Wene had beauty, archness, wit;
No young man on her face could look
Who felt not pang he ill could brook;
He loved, or in his bosom strove
With something similar to love;

And when she tried her witching skill,
Her eye with certainty could kill.
Now, in the royal robes array'd,
With gold and jewels overlaid,
She seem'd a being of romance,
A thing of perfect elegance;
And Haco, trembling, scarcely trow'd
Before an earthly maid he bow'd—
Such dignity, in mien and eye,
A man beholds in majesty!

O titled rank, long be it thine
From common gaze remote to shine!
And long be nursed thy speech refined
From scrutiny of vulgar mind!
That thing, in robes of state attired,
The closer seen, the less admired,
Kept at a distance, still may draw
The homage of respect and awe:
Therefore most humbly do I sue,
In name of rank, and reverence due,
Subordination, manners prim,
And all that keeps a land in trim,

To keep thy sphere, whate'er it be,
From scar of scoundrel scrutiny.
This thing did Wene, for honour's sake,
Upholding rank she chanced to take;
And Wene knew more, as you'll espy,
Of men and things, than you or I.

As Haco spoke, the elf the while
Lighted her visage with a smile,
And gave him look that thrill'd each vein;
For who could stand the eye of Wene?
The prince took heart, and blushing said,
"Here, at thy feet, O royal maid,
One moment list th' unwelcome theme,
And hear thy servant's simple scheme."—

"Not at OUR feet," Queen Wene replied,
With voice and air most dignified;
"A prince thou art—a foe, 'tis true—
Yet—rise—that honour is thy due.
No good from this can WE divine;
But let us hear that scheme of thine."—

" O say not foe !—If in this heart
One atom acted foeman's part,
I'd dig it from its latent goal,
The sanguine fountain of the soul !
What I will do, thou yet shalt see,
For peace, for Scotland, and for thee.
My uncle Eric loves thee more
Than ever king did queen before ;
I know it—but he's old—whilst thou
Hast all that loved and living glow
Which youth on virgins can bestow.
Now, since I've seen thee, and approve,
And feel to see thee is to love,
Might Haco but thy heart engage,
No deadly wars the Norse might wage.
For, take my word, if here they stay,
War there must be, do as you may ;
In spite of truce or treaties made,
Their breaking forth is but delay'd.
As certain as the wind must blow
Cold o'er their polar wastes of snow,
So, where the chiefs of Scania are,
Must there be ravage, waste, and war.

" This to prevent, and Scotland free,
Might you transfer your troth to me,
Here might we reign, on stable throne,
In old imperial Beregon;
And to your Albyn's present bound
Unite our islands all around.
And when the time comes, as it may,
That Scandinavia owns my sway,
O'er these thy towers shall wave unfurl'd
The ensigns of the northern world,
And Scotia's free, unyielding land
To all these regions give command.
These things I deem'd, O beauteous Hynde,
Worthy the counsel of your mind.
To do them all I pledge my troth—
No son of Odin breaks his oath."—

" Prince," said Queen Wene, " you pledge too high;
Even sanguine maid may not rely
On such great privilege and command,
And 'vantage to her native land.
But yet the eye would be severe,
And heart, that judged you insincere.

Yet all the answer I can deign,
As 'tis—(to those o'er whom I reign,
The slave and vassal, subject still
To what they feel and what they will—)
Is this,—to thank you, and take leave.
This hand in friendship please receive;
And, as thou lovest my peace and bliss,
Venture no more on scheme like this."—

Haco kneel'd down in rapture bland,
And took the elfin's queenly hand,
Impress'd it with a kiss sincere,
And wet the bracelet with a tear;
Whilst Wene, with all her shrewd address
Could scarce her merriment suppress.
The prince upraised his humid eye,
And noting well her aspect sly,
Turn'd half away with mimic flush,
With dimple, and with fairy blush,
Fled all at once his humble air,
And but the lover nought was there.
Light as the bound of roe-buck young,
To footstool of the throne he sprung;

Put one arm round the royal neck;
The other, with all due respect,
Her jewell'd bosom did enfold
The gentle form and arms to hold;
And then did lips in silence tell
Where lover's lip delights to dwell.
Full oft can maid, with frowning brows,
Reprove the act she well allows,
Though dear, as now, th' impassion'd scene—
And action was the soul of Wene!

Prince Haco's youthful heart o'erflow'd,
And turn'd to wax that liquid glow'd;
And that fond kiss a seal has set
Of female form and coronet
On it, so deep, that from its core
That form was ne'er erased more;
For every thought his mind pursued
The dear, the treacherous form renew'd.

True, though Queen Wene her squire beloved
With sharp and cutting words reproved,

Yet in her radiant eye was seen
No proud offence nor pointed spleen;
And as he left her throne supreme,
His ardent spirit to inflame,
She cast that look of matchless art,
That never fail'd on young man's heart,
And said, with sigh, "Hard is my lot!
Had I my will—as *I have not!*"—
Then bent she down her brow sublime,
And wiped her cheek of beauty's prime.

The winding stair had steps a score—
Prince Haco made them only four;
And when he reach'd the outer gate,
That led from Selma's halls of state,
Adown the steep, from rock to stone,
Light as a kid, he bounded on,
And won the street of Beregon;
Pleased to the soul with his address,
His courage, and his bold success.

Vain simple youth! thy bosom's queen,
The lovely and mischievous Wene,

On tassell'd footstool of the throne,
In powerless laughter hath sunk down;
And, prince, 'tis all at thy expense—
Thy ardour, truth, and impudence.

Loth would Dunedin's daughter be,
T' admit such license, Wene, like thee;
Even though a prince or general came,
Or poet, a much greater name!
For I have seen the mincing thing,
As dancing round the gleesome ring,
A gap leave in our saraband,
And shrink from poet's gloveless hand;
As if the touch of sun-burnt palm
Could discompose the level calm
Of virgin blood, or sacred core,
Or make the guiltless so no more.

O shame—O shame!—that such a blot
Should e'er attach to lovely Scot!
Oft have I mark'd the rueful flaw,
And blush'd at what I heard and saw.

No book, however pure each thought,
Though by divine or matron wrote,
Darest thou essay aloud to read,
Till every page is duly weigh'd,
And each equivocation eyed,
And conn'd, and all constructions tried;
And then thou skipp'st whole pages o'er,
Of Galt, of Byron, and of Moore.
This have I seen, and grieved anew
At thy constructions so untrue.

Would'st thou this cherish'd frippery weigh
In reason's scale, 'tis plain as day,
That fishing, hunting on the scent
For what thou know'st was never meant,
Of all indelicacies framed
By heart impure, or folly named,
Is sure the worst, the most confess'd.
O such discoveries well attest
To what research the thoughts are led,
In what a school the mind was bred!

In Selma's halls much laughter grew,
And many queries Wene forth drew;
But not one word would she unfold,
Till to the queen the whole she told,
Who smiled, half in delight and pain,
At the unbridled freaks of Wene.
From that day forth, right carefully,
She shunn'd the glance of Haco's eye;
No more as queen he her could see,
And less she did not choose to be;
But some supposed her thoughts were given
To him at least as much as Heaven;
While he, most blest, illustrious wight!
Was crazed, was drunken with delight.
A queen's own lover! Yes, forsooth—
And such a queen!—O happy youth!
His step grew lighter than the wind,
Aye when he thought of beauteous Hynde;
And often to himself he talk'd,
Smiling and swaggering as he walk'd—
"Well done, Prince Haco! Say who can,
Thou hast not quit thee like a man!"—

Now every day and every hour
Brought new supplies of Scottish power.
Lochaber's Thane came down the coast,
With full seven hundred in his host;
And on the eve of that same day
Came all the motley tribes of Spey,
Led by a chief of eastern fame,
Mordun Moravius by name.
And from the Dee's wild branching flood,
The rapid Mar, of royal blood,
Brought his grim files, to battle bred,
Against the Pict and Saxon led,
Till for high deeds they were renown'd
The bravest troops on British ground.

Then came old Diarmid of Argyle,
With men from many a southern isle,
Round whose domains the waters flow,
From far Cantire to dark Lochow;
Two thousand men, a hardy train,
Rose from these margins of the main.

Then Donald Gorm, the Lord of Skye,
Came down attended gallantly,
With Pagan standards broad unfurl'd,
The remnants of a heathen world.
And last, but steadiest of the band,
The loyal Lord of Sutherland
Came with his clans from frith and glen;
And Harold, with his Caithness men.
These then the names of highest worth,
That ruled the land from south to north.

But, long ere this, the holy seer
Had fail'd at council to appear;
Matins were said, and vespers sung,
In royal hall, by old and young;
But Columba was gone, yet how,
Or when, or whence, they did not know;
While sadness, solemn and resign'd,
Sat on the brow of lovely Hynde.

In council there was deep surmise
Why he had gone in secret guise;

Some blamed him for a coward's part,
And some of deep and monkish art;
And all the chiefs arrived of late,
Convened in fiery fierce debate,
Arraign'd his counsels to the last,
The armistice—all that had pass'd.
What shame, they said, to risk with foe
Their queen and country at a blow!
As who could answer for his might,
Or skill, or courage, in the fight;
While the high stakes for which he stood
Sufficient were to chill the blood,
The highest soul the most to alarm,
And wrest the nerve from hero's arm?
In short, one feeling there prevail'd,
A wayward one, to be bewail'd;
It was, that, maugre dangers deep,
That shameful truce they would not keep!

" List me, my lords," said rapid Mar,
That whirlwind in the field of war,
And at the council-board the same,
A very wreath of mounting flame;

While all too many fierce, austere,
Congenial souls of his were there—
" List me. Who was it made the vow
To keep this peace?—Was't I or you?—
Or who this foolish combat set?
Who but a peevish anchoret,
Who knew not of our high command,
Or the resources of the land?
The queen, you say, in council high
Approved the truce. I that deny.
Who is there that our queen should sway
To such a deed when we're away?
We are the land, we'll let them know,
The people, and the sovereign too.
Arouse, then, lords, and let us rush
On these rude bears their force to crush;
O'erwhelm them in their bloated den,
That loathsome sty of living men,
And leave them neither root, nor stem,
Nor tongue to howl their requiem!"—

" Here is the sword and warrior form
Shall lead the fray!" cried Donald Gorm.

Then rose old Diarmid of Argyle,
With brow severe and placid smile,
Upraised his hand amid the rage,
The wild commotion to assuage,
And thus began :—" My lords, I deem
This truce made in a great extreme,
When none were nigh the foe to check,
Or crown or city to protect ;
And, by its breach, would we not draw
Disgrace on Albyn's throne and law ?
Would it not be more courteous plan
To fight their champions, man to man ?
And if the issue falls aright,
As fall it must to Scottish might,
Then all is well. But should the Norse
Put Albyn's heroes to the worse,
Then be the vigour of our host
Strain'd to the height, else all is lost ;
For ne'er to proud presumptuous foe
Must we our queen and crown forego.
I say not how we shall proceed,
Each day's events must rule the deed ;

But in one point we'll all agree,
Of foreign thraldom to be free.
I thank you, chiefs, for this regard,
And pray no gasconade be heard,
Till once the important lists be set,
And champions hand to hand have met;
And then, let that eventful day
Our future deeds and counsels sway."—

Assent ensued, but some there were
Who look'd with discontented air.
The chief of these, the Lord of Skye,
Bit his proud lip, and bent his eye,
And mutter'd some impatient say
Of the intolerance of delay.
With right or wrong, he long'd for blows
With Albyn's fierce invading foes,
Who long, on prey and havoc keen,
To him had pesterous neighbours been:
But voices bore it, and the while
The suffrages were for Argyle.

That ancient chief again address'd
His stern compeers, and warmly press'd
Of peace the strong necessity,
Mix'd with their foes as they would be;
And farther said, " I grieve to hear
Dishonour cast on Albyn's seer;
A man, the most upright and true,
That e'er our sinful nation knew;
Whose warmest prayers, and highest zeal,
Are all for Scotland's worth and weal.
Where he is gone, I can't divine,
But for this truth the pledge be mine,
Of word and honour, that the saint
On scheme for our behoof is bent.
Either on secret mission sped
To Christian prince for timely aid,
Or else in fasting day and night
Before his God, in piteous plight;
For all our sins imploring Heaven
That they in mercy be forgiven;
And that this land, within whose bound
The Cross of Christ a rest hath found,

May 'scape this overwhelming snare,
And still be God's peculiar care.

" Nor deem this naught. In olden time,
In writings holy and sublime,
Strong instances stand on record
Of times unnumber'd, when the Lord,
At the requests of prophets, rent
The floors of heaven, and succour sent.

" There stands one record, never lost,
Of captain of the Lord's own host,
Who pray'd on Gilgal's plain by night
Against the invading Amorite ;
And lo ! the heaven's dark breast distended,
And from its hideous folds descended
Hailstones of such enormous frame,
Like broken pillars down they came,
Or fragments, splinter'd and uneven,
Of rocks shook from the hills of heaven.
Upon the Amorite's marshall'd power
Was cast down this appalling shower,

Till thousands of their proud array
Deform'd and shatter'd corses lay.

" Still God's dread work was but begun,
At man's behest he stay'd the sun;
Arrested, fix'd in heaven, he shone,
And the moon paused o'er Ajalon;
Until the arm of man had done
What arm of angel had begun.
Then let no sinner, old or young,
Against a prophet wag his tongue,
Lest vengeance on his head befall,
And bring down wrath upon us all.

" At holy Samuel's sacrifice,
Fierce lightnings issued from the skies,
In streams so rapid and so dire,
The firmament seem'd all on fire.
And then such thunders roll'd abroad,
As ne'er burst from the throne of God;
Till Mispah hill, in terrors wild,
Rock'd like the cradle of a child,

Then yawn'd, and swallow'd quick to hell
The enemies of Israel.
The remnant turn'd, and fled away,
In utter horror and dismay;
Without a blow they were cut down,
And all their country overthrown.—
There is but one thing on the earth
I hold as unexcell'd in worth;
It is (and who its scope may scan!)
The prayer of a righteous man.
And firmly as I trust in this,
That I've a spirit made for bliss,
I do, that this divine of ours
Is trusted by the heavenly powers."—

The Lord of Skye sprung from his chair,
And, waving both his arms in air,
Thus said, in loud impassion'd twang,
"What boots this starch'd and stale harangue?
Has this old driveller of the Isle
Made canting monk of old Argyle?
If so, I boldly would suggest
To shun their counsel as a pest.

Who deems the chiefs of Albyn's reign
Of dogged churl can bear the chain,
Or stoop their lineage to disgrace?
Let bedesman keep to bedesman's place!
Stick to his bedework and his beads,
His crosiers and his canting creeds;
For should he more, or say I wis
That Donald Gorm is that or this,
Or small or great, or weak or strong,
Or meek or proud, or right or wrong,
By the dread soul of Selma's king,
The dotard from the rock I'll fling!"—
The nobles answer'd with a smile,
And sided all with old Argyle.

"But where is good Columba gone?
Why has he left the tottering throne
In time of trial and of woe?"
I hear thee ask, and thou must know,
Fair maiden, patroness of mine,
As far as I, of his design.

That very night the truce was made,
After the saint his prayers had said,
In lonely cell his couch he chose,
Not for the slumbers of repose,
But that no worldly listening ear
His communings with God might hear;
And there he hymns to Jesus sung,
Till utterance died upon his tongue,
And sleep her genial unguent shed
Soft round the good man's hoary head.
Then all his visions were of bliss,
In other climes and worlds than this.

That night to him a vision came,
Like form of elemental flame,
That seem'd some messenger of grace,
But yet it wore a human face,
With lineaments the saint had seen,
But in what land he could not ween.
" Dost thou remember me ?" it said.
Columba raised his reverend head,
And sore his memory did strain
At recollection, but in vain.

But the bright shadow, he could see,
Some semblage bore of royalty.

The phantom form of lambent flame
Waited a while, then nigher came,
And said, with deep and hollow moan,
In sorrow's most subduing tone,
" Woe's me, that thou remember'st not
Thy early friend! and hast forgot
That once to him thou vow'd'st a vow.
'Twas for a child—Where is he now?
The first of Albyn's race supreme
Thou didst baptize in Jesus' name.—
Where is he now? thou must him find;
For he of all the human kind
Is rightful heir, and he alone
To Caledonia's ancient throne,
In which 'tis destined he must reign,
Else it is lost to Albyn's line.
Think of my words; the time is now;
Sacred and solemn was the vow.
If he appears not on this coast,
The nation's liberty is lost."—

" Yes, I remember word and time,"
Columba said, in tone sublime;
" And sacred vow I made to thee,
And straight perform'd that vow shall be.
My early friend! And art thou come,
From thy far-off, eternal home,
To warn me of the times to be,
And of thy people's destiny?
I'll treasure up thy words and go,
And do what arm of flesh can do,
To bring that prince back to the land
Where he is destined to command.
To keep that vow I'll not decline;
But say, my friend, what fate is thine?
Where hast thou sojourn'd since thy death—
In heaven above, or hell beneath?
Oft have I dared of God to crave
Some tidings from beyond the grave;
Now they are come. For love of Heaven,
Be this unto thy servant given.
Tell me of all that thou hast seen
In heaven, or hell, or place between!"—

" No !" said the spirit, raising high
His brow sublime, with kindling eye,
And shaking locks that stream'd as bright
As the first rays of morning light—
" No !—Who to mortal thing would send
Tidings he cannot comprehend ?
Till once the bourn of death is pass'd,
A veil o'er all beyond is cast,
That future things conceal'd may lie,
Hid from the glance of sinful eye ;
For mortal tongue may never name,
Nor human soul presume to frame,
The scenes beyond the grave that lie
In shadows of eternity.
Concealment suits thy being best ;
Then O, in darkness let them rest !
When thou and I shall meet again,
Whether in land of living pain,
Or in the vales above the sky,
Then thou shalt know as much as I."—

Columba, listening, paused in dread ;
He look'd again, the form was fled !

'Twas that of Christian Conran gone,
Who once had sat on Albyn's throne.
A king of mighty name was he,
And famed for grace and piety.
He died. His brother seized his crown;
Eugene, a king of great renown,
And left it, as before defined,
Unto his daughter, lovely Hynde.
When Conran died, Columba then
Bore his young son across the main,
As he had sworn, with pious breath,
To Conran on his bed of death;
And gave the infant to the hand
Of Colmar, King of Erin's land.

That king, who ruled a people wild,
Was grandsire to the comely child;
And train'd that stem of royal name
To everything a prince became;
With fix'd resolve, at his own death,
To him his kingdom to bequeath.
Thus both the realms contented were,
With laws, with government, and heir;

And good Columba thought no more
Of vow that exile to restore ;
For peace he cherish'd—peace alone—
'Mong all who bow'd at Jesus' throne.

But now this message from the dead
New light upon the future shed.
It was a dream ; but it was truth ;
A vow had issued from his mouth,
A sacred vow, that child to guard,
And use his influence revered,
Again to bring him to his own
And father's long descended crown.

Columba rose at midnight deep,
And roused his followers from their sleep,
Sailors and monks, a motley corps,
And straight they hasten'd to the shore,
Upheaved the anchor silently,
Unfurl'd the sails, and put to sea.—
" For Erin straight," Columba cried.
" At Colmar's court, whate'er betide,

I needs must be without delay.
No time be lost!—Speed we away!"—
His word was law; the vessel flew
Across the waters, waving blue,
With her dark sails, and darker train,
Like mournful meteor of the main.
Albyn's apostle's fervent prayer
With Heaven prevail'd; the winds were fair.
These, with the tides, and billows prone,
Seem'd all combined to bear her on.
With swiftness of the soaring swan,
She foam'd, she murmur'd, and she ran,
Till safe within Temora bay,
Like thing outworn, she leaning lay.

King Colmar, at an early hour,
Was looking from his topmost tower,
And saw the bark before the gale,
Speeding her course with oar and sail.—
"This visit bodes no good," said he.
"What brings these truant monks to me?
Either they come for some supply
To their new-founded sanctuary,

Or warlike force, to cross the main,
And press their young usurper's reign.
They shall have neither, by yon sun!
Small good to Erin have they done.
For though this father bears a name
Of sanctitude and reverend fame,
I've always found that horde a pest,
An ulcer, and a hornet's nest.
Their cause is lost ere they appear;
I'm quite in mood their suit to hear."—

Columba came—his message said—
Old Colmar smiled, and shook his head.
" The prince," said he, " is far from this,
Fighting my enemies and his.
But as well might you ask of me
My crown and kingdom seriously.
Whom have I now my foes to quell?
Or tame my subjects that rebel?
Or who at last my crown to wear,
But he, my kinsman and my heir?"—

" O, King of Erin, hear me speak,
And see the tears on my wan cheek.
I seek the prince, his own to gain ;
In Albyn his the right to reign.
And well thou know'st I made a vow,
Ere I consign'd the child to you,
All my poor influence to strain
To bring him to his own domain.
Now, such the crisis on our coast,
There's not one instant to be lost.
The powerful Eric of the north
Has drawn his heathen myriads forth,
Who, at this moment, lie around
Old Beregonium's sacred ground.
He beat our warriors on the coast,
And braves them as a nerveless host,
Threatening their force to overgo,
And lay the towers of Selma low,
Unless he's granted, without frown,
To wed their queen and wear their crown.
A transient truce is sign'd and seal'd,
Till adverse champions on the field

Shall meet, and strive in mortal game,
Each for his own and country's fame;
And whosoe'er the victory gains
Wins Albyn's queen, and her domains."—

Old Colmar paused, and turn'd him round,
His dim eye fix'd upon the ground,
And thrice he stroked his bearded chin,
While voices murmur'd him within.
His face was like a winter eve,
When clouds arise and billows heave,
And hinds look to the western skies,
Uncertain where the storm shall rise,
Or whether, mixing with the main,
It may not all subside again.

So stood the king, with ardour fraught,
The model of suspense and thought;
Then cross'd his arms upon his breast,
And thus the yearning sire address'd:—
" Now, by my father's sword and shield,
If this be true thou hast reveal'd,

The prize hath in its scope a charm
That well befits a hero's arm.
There was a day, but it is past,
When this arm had not been the last
In such a high and martial play;
Though it had led my steps away,
Through flood and fire, o'er shore and main,
To wastes beneath the polar wain,
Or lands that warrior never won,
Beyond the rising of the sun.
Gods! how the high and glorious theme
Lights this old heart with living flame!

"For some few days remain with me,
And as thou lists thy cheer shall be.
Of wine and feasting have thy fill;
But if perchance it be thy will
To fast and pray, by Heaven, I'll not
Baulk such devotion—not a jot!
With prince and nobles of my court
I must have speech of high import,
Of your demand, and then expect
An answer downright and direct."—

" O sovereign liege, great is the need
For answer most direct indeed;
Else, ere we reach the Scottish shore,
The eventful combat may be o'er,
And I had message from the grave
That he alone our land could save."—

" What! From the grave?—Pray thee, relate
How, where, and why this fact so late?
Came there a voice direct from God?
Or came it oozing through the sod,
Where purple flow'rets weep and bloom
Above the warrior's bloody tomb?
Say, was it so? For if it came
From grave of monk, 'tis scarce the same."—

" 'Twas in a dream the spirit spoke."—

" Ha! In a dream!—'Tis all a joke!
I've had such dreams—such visions seen;
But what an idiot I had been
If I had dared on them rely!
But hadst thou seen, as oft have I,

Thy father's soul rise in his shroud,
From out the waste, like livid cloud,
In awful guise, without control
To wax and wane, and writhe and roll;
Approaching thee like giant grim,
With locks of mist and eyeballs dim,
And while the hairs crept on thy head,
And all thy frame shook like a reed,
If thou hadst heard a language run
Into thy soul, as I have done,
Then had I deem'd thy message sent
By some great power beneficent,
That rules around, above, below,
One whom I dread, but do not know.
But, as it is, it goes for nought;
I hope I hold it as I ought."—

King Colmar turn'd him round, and left
The seer well nigh of hope bereft,
Grieving with tears for Albyn's fate,
Her destiny, and perilous state.
But leave we him, by rock and wood,
To kneel, and pray, and kiss the rood,

And follow Colmar to his hall,
Where stood the prince and nobles all.

He told them all full sullenly.
Prince Eiden danced in youthful glee,
And shouted till the armour rung
Against the wall, and sounding swung.—
" Come, let us go. Come, my Cuithone,
And, Parlan, put your armour on;
If men on earth can beat us three,
Mightier than mortals they must be.
My heart is burning in my breast
To meet King Eric in the list;
Yes, brand to brand, and face to face,
Down goes the boast of Odin's race!
Come, let us haste; the time is near,
For sake of all, to warriors dear!"—

King Colmar's lip, with anger dumb,
Stiffen'd beneath his toothless gum;
And his white eye-brows scowl'd as deep
As snow-cloud o'er the wintery steep,

As up he strode to Eiden's eye,
Shaking his palsied hand on high.—
" Thou babbler's brood of bounce and bang!
Thou lion's cub without the fang!
Think'st thou thy weetless warrior rage
Can be endured by sober age,
Well versed in deep affairs of state,
And by experience made sedate?
I tell thee, prince, in speech downright,
One foot thou goest not from my sight,
On such a raffle—made for fools,
The lowest of ambition's tools.

" Dost thou not see 'tis all intrigue,
A cursed and formidable league,
To wile thee hence, and take thy life,
On wild pretence of warrior strife?
There is no lord in Caledon
Who does not hope to fill thy throne,
And from high interest's sure to be
Thy sworn and mortal enemy.

" Then go not to that fatal strand,
Nor leave thy old protector's hand,
Who has no hope but in thy sway,
Nor comfort when thou art away.
Were it to fight our common foe,
As Prince of Erin thou should'st go,
With such an army in thy rear,
That force or guile I should not fear.
But to this game of fools to go,
And combat with thou know'st not who,
I make a vow was never broke,
A promise that I'll not revoke,
By the great Spirit I adore,
One foot thou movest not from this shore!"—

The prince a low obeisance made,
But his fair face was flush'd with red;
Which Colmar saw, and still his ire
The hotter blazed like spreading fire;
And sore he threaten'd, in his rage,
To chain the prince in iron cage,

Rather than suffer him to roam
Blustering about another home,
And raving of a thing so low—
A war of pedantry and show.

Straight to the seer then Colmar went,
Part of his jealousy to vent;
And neither sanctity of name,
Nor mien revered, could ward the same.
He told him roundly he was sent,
On base intrigue, to circumvent
The prince's progress to the throne,
And cut him off by guile alone.
Then talk'd, in haughtiness and wrath,
Of renegades from ancient faith,
Who, maugre all their humble airs,
Were ne'er to trust in state affairs.

Columba smiled, and with an eye
That shone through tears, said fervently,
" O sire, withhold the rash resolve,
And vow, which thou canst not dissolve;

Say nought thy Saviour to aggrieve.
In him dost thou not yet believe?"—

"No, not one jot!" King Colmar said;
"I worship, as my fathers did,
The King of Heaven omnipotent,
And yon bright sun, his vicegerent;
And when HE hides his face from me,
I kneel beneath the green oak tree.
But thou hast made the prince a fool,
By the weak tenets of thy school;
All founded on a woman's words,
Which ill with sovereignty accords.
I'll none of them! And, once for all,
Leave thou my shore, lest worse befall;
Nor ask thou that which is not fit—
To see the prince I'll not permit;
And if thou art not under way
Before the noontide of the day,
Perhaps a bed and sleep thou'lt find
Ill suiting thy ambitious mind."—

Columba for forgiveness pray'd
On the old heathen's hoary head;
Then fled his fierce and angry glance,
Groaning in heart for the mischance,
That thus of hope his soul bereft,
And Albyn to destruction left.

The sable bark went out to sea,
Lashing and leaning to the lee;
But northward when she turn'd her prow,
She met the tide in adverse flow;
And the north breeze, in boastful sough,
Told them, in language plain enough,
That all their force of sail and oar
Would fail in making Albyn's shore.

To brave the king they had no mind,
But northward toil'd against the wind
Till midnight; then, at change of tide,
To a small creek they turn'd aside.
Of sailor monks there were but few;
And the dull lazy rower crew

Declared no farther they could wend,
Though that should prove their journey's end.

Unless in time of utmost need,
Columba held it high misdeed
To weary Heaven with earnest suit.
But danger now, and want to boot,
Obliged him humbly to apply
To his kind Maker, presently
Help to afford, by tide or wind,
Or by the hand of human kind.

The creek was all retired and bare;
Nor hamlet, hall, nor cot, was there;
Yet one approaching they could see,
Ere the good man rose from his knee.
Down from the cliff the being strode,
Like angel sent direct from God,
To guide the father and his train
Back to their home amid the main.

The sun had just begun to flame
Above the coast of Cunninghame,

When this strange guest with caution drew
Toward our cowl'd and motley crew.
His step was firm, his stature tall;
Cunning, and strength, combined with all
The rudeness of the savage kerne,
Kythed in his hideous face altern.
His feet were sandall'd, and his coat
Made of the hide of mountain goat.
His dark locks, matted and unshorn,
Had ne'er been comb'd since he was born.
A russet plaid hung to his knee;
In sooth, a fearful wight was he.

Few were his words, when words were said;
But, ah! his looks compensement made—
Where terror, wonder, fierceness, rose
By turns, on youthful face morose.
The monks at times upon him smiled,
Then trembled at his gestures wild.

Columba wist not what to do—
To ask his aid, or let him go.

He saw his followers ill inclined
Towards the rude, uncourtly hind;
And some even whisper'd in his ear,
He was some fiend of other sphere.
Still, being at the moment given,
While aid had been implored from Heaven,
The sire conceived, that duty press'd
Some farther knowledge of his guest.

He call'd him in before his face.
The youth advanced with giant pace;
While his elf locks, of dew to dry,
He wildly shook above his eye,
Folded his rude plaid o'er his knee,
Look'd at his leg of symmetry,
Next at his sword, that trail'd behind,—
An oaken club without the rind,—
Then stood in half averted way,
To listen what the sire would say.

He told his name, his age, his wit,
And all for which his strength was fit;

But in such terms, the sire was moved
To mirth, which ill his frame behoved.
M'Houston was the varlet's name;
He could not say from whence he came,
But he was born beyond the sea,
And there again he long'd to be.
" What sea?" was ask'd. He look'd askance;
And O what pride was in his glance,
As he return'd, in giggling tone,
" Who ever heard of sea but one?"—
O, he could row, and he could sail,
And guide the rudder in the gale;
And he could make the vessel glide,
Wriggling against the wind and tide.
By his own tale, he was such man
As ne'er from jib to rudder ran;
But all their proffers of reward
He scorn'd, and held of no regard,
Till once they mention'd warrior brand,
When they arrived on Scotia's strand.
Then kindled the barbarian's eye,
He flew on board with rapturous cry;

And from his side his club he flung,
That in the fold of mantle swung,
Like sheathed sword; then, with a shock,
He wrench'd the hawser from the rock;
And ere the monkish crew had time
The Virgin's sacred name to chime,
The bark had rock'd upon her keel,
And from the beach began to heel.

"Do this!—Do that!" the savage roar'd,
And, heaving high his oaken sword,
He threaten'd sore, with growl and frown,
Whoe'er refused, to cleave him down.
The crew at first began to wink,
And from their posts essay'd to shrink;
But blows from tall M'Houston's tree
Made them apply most strenuously.
Close by the helm his post he took;
All shrunk from his offended look:
Whene'er he deign'd to sing or speak,
A smile would dimple rower's cheek,
But yet so gruffly and so grim,
It shew'd how much they dreaded him.

For lazier train no leader knew
Than good Columba's sailor crew.

M'Houston by the helm stood fast,
And oft upon the sky he cast
A troubled look, and then again
Would fix it on the heaving main;
Then shake his black and matted hair,
And sing aloud some savage air.

At length he said, with careless joke,
And aye he stuttered as he spoke—
" My masters, we shall have a gale;
Stand by the beam, and reef the sail;
And he who fails, or handles slack,
Here's for the dastard vassal's back.

" Where art thou gone, thou angry Sun?
What crime hath poor M'Houston done,
That thus thou hidest thy radiant form
Behind the darkness of the storm,
And leavest thy servant to the sway
Of tempest on his wilder'd way?

No friend in whom he can confide;
No little star his path to guide;
No parent dear to say adieu:
Such poor M'Houston never knew!
Nothing but weak and feeble men,
Some darksome slaves from downward den.
But if, O Sun, thy will it be,
I'll sacrifice them all to thee,
If thou thy servant's life wilt save
From bursting cloud and breaking wave:
Or shew thy glorious face above,
If these are objects of thy love."—

By chance, the words were scarcely spoke,
When through the low'ring darkness broke
A ray of sunshine wanly bright,
A transient gleam of livid light—
Like the last smile from beauty's eye,
Resign'd, and laid in peace to die;
That farewell glance, of smile and shiver,
Ere darkness seals the orb for ever.
So pass'd the sunbeam o'er the deck:
The savage then, with due respect,

Kneel'd down, and bow'd his matted head;
Then look'd around with awful dread.—

"Now, friends," he cried,—"for friends we are,—
For toil, or death, let all prepare.
See where the hurricane comes on
With violence dreadful and unknown:
The western world is in commotion;
See how the clouds oppress the ocean;
And ocean, into vengeance driven,
With foamy billow scourges heaven.
Our bark will prove before its swing
Like fern upon the whirlwind's wing.
Wake the old carle you call the seer,
And ask him whereto we shall steer;
For toward sunrise we must fly,
With stern right in the tempest's eye:
A weather shore we needs must make—
It is our last, our only stake."—

They ran the holy man to warn,
And told him of the hideous kerne,

That pray'd to heathen deity,
And brought the storm along the sea;
And every monk, in language strong,
Declared the Arch-Fiend them among.

Columba left his books and prayer
With something of a timid air,
And moved his head above the deck
Just as the masts began to creak.
He cast his eye before, behind;
Then cried, with troubled voice and mind,
" To Isla Sound! then we're at home"—
And pointed out the path of foam.—

" 'Twould be as wise to gaze and ponder
Upon the sky, and point us yonder,"
The savage said; " but here is land,
Which we might win, if you command."—
To east by south he turn'd her prow:
The rattling hail, and pelting snow,
Just then in furious guise began;
Loud gusts along the ocean ran;

And every sob the tempest gave
Spoke language of a watery grave.—

" Stand by the beam, the main-sail under,"
M'Houston cried, in voice of thunder,
" Pull in—Let go—You dastard knaves !
Down with your beads into the waves !
If cross, or bead, I note again,
I'll hurl the holder in the main.
O King of Heaven ! such furious storm
Did ne'er the ocean's breast deform !"—

The bark flew on before the wind,
So like a thing of soul and mind,
It made the savage shout with glee,
" There goes the jewel of the sea !
Speed on ! speed on, my bonny bark !
Behind the storm is rolling dark ;
But if such glorious speed thou make,
Swift is the storm will thee o'ertake.
O, speed thou on, thou blessed thing,
Swift as the solan on the wing !

And if behind yon headland blue
Safely thou bear'st this fiend-like crew,
Then poor M'Houston, on his knee,
Shall offer sacrifice to thee;
For God's own blessed oak I know
His only emblem here below."—

The monks quaked like the aspin slim,
And their dark looks grew deadly dim;
They deem'd each wave would them o'erwhelm.
With savage heathen at the helm,
Or fiend arrived from burning hell!
Their woful plight what tongue could tell?

Yet still the bark her speed did strain,
For better never plough'd the main;
Till at the last, amid the roar
Of waves behind, and waves before,
By cataract and swell o'erthrown,
Adown she went with clash and groan.—

"Hold by the cords!" M'Houston yell'd.
(Gods! how the monks and rowers held!)

" To see the bottom of the main
We but descend to rise again."—
Down went the bark, with stern upright,
Down many fathoms from the light.
As sea-bird, mid the breakers toss'd,
Screaming and fluttering off the coast,
Dives from the surf of belch and foam,
To seek a milder, calmer home,
So sought the bark her downward way,
From meeting waves and mounting spray.

" Hold by the cords !" M'Houston call'd;
The monks obey'd, full sore appall'd.
Here rose a groan, and there a scream,
As down they bore into the stream;
But these were stifled in the brine,
As dived the sable brigandine;
And all was silent, save the gull
That mounted from the stormy Mull.

'Twas but a trice of lash and lave,
Till, on the top of mountain wave,

The bark appear'd with flapping sail,
And dripping monks, and rowers pale,
Hanging on ropes all here and there,
Deaf, blind, and blurting with despair.
Again they heard M'Houston's tongue,
As loud he hallo'd out and sung,
" Stand to your tackle manfully;
Hold fast, and leave the rest to me !"—

Again the waves roll'd o'er the deck;
But, be it told with due respect,
At this dire moment, who should call
From ridge of wave and tossing fall,
But the good seer! Not seen till now;
Wash'd from his hold, they knew not how,
Blinded with cowl of many a fold,
And wildly capering as he roll'd.
M'Houston caught him by the frock,
And held him stedfast as a rock;
Yet not one moment quitted post,
Though fearfully 'mong breakers toss'd,
Nor once turn'd round his eye, to scan
The plight of that most holy man,

But sung and shouted o'er the swell,
With maniac laugh and demon yell.

He saw, what others saw at last,
That all the danger was o'erpast;
For this turmoil, this uproar dire,
Was at the point of Low Kintyre,
Where breaking waves, and stormy stir,
Still fright the coasting mariner.
Now were they breasting mountain steep;
Now plunging 'mid the foamy deep;
Anon they wheel'd from out the roar,
And swept along a weather shore,
Beneath the bank of brake and tree,
Upon a smooth and tranquil sea.

Columba stared in dread amaze;
The pallid monks return'd the gaze.
For him, whose tall and giant form
Seem'd late the demon of the storm,
They now ween'd angel in disguise,
Sent down, to save them, from the skies;

And knew not how their guest to greet,
Or if to worship at his feet.—

" Who *art* thou?" said Columba then;
" Thou best of angels, or of men!
For if commission'd from above,
By the dear Saviour whom I love,
As guardian spirit of the sea,
I'll kneel, and pay my vows to thee."—

The savage laugh'd with such good will,
That eagles answer'd on the hill,
Sail'd on the bosom of the cloud,
And neigh'd as fiercely and as loud.

" Ha? Worship me? That would be brave!
A homeless vagrant and a slave.
Worship the Sun; whose glorious road
Along'st the heaven was never trod;
Who frowns, and men are in distress;
Who smiles, and all is loveliness!
But if of better God you know,
In heaven above, or earth below,

Or seraph, saint, or demon grim,
Tell me, and I will worship him."—

The holy sire, to tears constrain'd,
The doctrine of the cross explain'd;
The fall—the covenant above,
And wonders of redeeming love.
M'Houston listen'd silently,
His dark locks trembling o'er his eye,
Then said, it was his good belief
That Jesus was a noble chief;
For none could more for vassals' good,
Than for their sakes to shed his blood;
And for that cause, it was his mind
To follow prince so brave and kind.—

" But yet the Sun of heaven," said he,
" Has been benignant god to me.
'Twas he who rear'd the roe-deer's brood,
And the young bristler of the wood;
The sprightly fawn, with dappled sides,
And leveret in the fern that hides;

The kid, so playful and so spruce;
And all for poor M'Houston's use.
'Tis he that makes the well to spring,
The dew to fall, the bird to sing;
And gives the berry of the waste
Its ripeness, and its savoury taste.
Oft with the rook and crow I've striven
For that delicious gift of Heaven;
Not elsewhere knowing when I first
Could quench my hunger or my thirst.

" 'Tis he that rears the racy pea,
And spreads the crowfoot on the lea,
And makes the holy acorn grow,
The highest gift to man below.
'Tis he that mars, the summer's prime,
The rabid storm, and wreathy rime,
Makes seas to roll, and rivers run—
M'Houston still must love the sun!"—

Columba answer'd with a sigh
To that barbarian's language high;

And wonder'd at his strength of mind,
In such low rank of human kind,
That, like his frame, seem'd thing elate
Far o'er the peasant's lowly state.
Thence he resolved to win the youth
Unto the holy Christian truth.
When, in Dalrudhain's lonely bay,
They render'd thanks to God that day,
Than he, none shew'd more humble frame,
Nor lowlier bow'd at Jesus' name.

Loud and more loud the tempest blew;
On high the fleeting lightnings flew;
The rain and sleet pour'd down so fierce,
As if the concave universe
Had been upset, or roll'd awry,
And oceans tumbled from the sky;
The heaven was swathed in sheets of gray,
And thunders gallow'd far away.

The seer, impatient to proceed,
Knowing his virgin sovereign's need,

Bade up that narrow frith to wend,
(Now call'd Loch-Fyne,) unto its end,
Resolved to cross the mountains dark,
And leave the sailors with the bark.
For a long night and stormy day,
They sail'd that long and narrow bay,
And the next day, at dawn of morn,
Mounted the pathless wastes of Lorn.

Columba and the savage rude
Enter'd alone that solitude;
For now he so admired the wight,
He scarce could bear him from his sight.
A dangerous path they had to scan,
For every petty torrent ran,
Pelting and foaming furiously,
As if to say, " Who dares come nigh ?"
Then proved the kerne a trusty guide,
And many a time his strength was tried,
O'er rugged steep, and rapid river,
Bearing the old man safely ever.

But when to Orchay's vale they came,
So mighty was that moorland stream,
'Twas like an ocean rolling on,
Resistless, dreadful, and alone!
Its path with desolation traced,
The valley all one watery waste,
One foamy wave, thundering and smoking,
And mighty pines rending and rocking.

Columba gazed upon the scene
So wild, terrific, and immane,
Until his lip grew pale as clay.
Said he, "I've journey'd many a day,
From hill of Zion to the shore
Beyond which there is land no more;
But never look'd, in all my time,
On aught so marvellous and sublime.
That day the storm was at its height,
Was trial 'twixt the wrong and right;
The wrong has triumph'd, now I know,
And Albyn's rights are lying low;
Her chosen chiefs are fall'n and gone;
For it was destined, one alone

Could save the land that fateful day,
And he was kept by Heaven away.
Its will be done; for well or woe,
We now must bend before the foe:
The Christian banner's in the toil,
The heathen riots in our spoil.

"I may be wrong, as grant I may;
But it is plain, that on that day
The storm hath all unequall'd been,
Such as no living man hath seen.
These are the signs of sinful deed,
And these are tokens that I dread.
The demons of the fiery reign
Have been abroad in Christ's domain,
Roused, by some powerful heathen spell,
From out the lurid vales of hell,
The face of earth and heaven to mar,
And hurl the elements in war.

"But—note me, youth—the time will come
That men shall stand, in terror dumb,

And see the Almighty's arm of power
Stretch'd forth in the avenging hour.
Yes, HE will shew to heaven, and hell,
And all that in the earth do dwell,
From babe, to prince upon the throne,
That HE is God, and HE alone!"—

But trust not all that prophets say;
The best may err, and so may they.
Predictions are but ticklish gear,
Though specious, logical, and clear,
Condensed, and penn'd in language strong,
Where once aright, they're ten times wrong.
This sage experience hath me taught,
Whilst thou hast hooted, rail'd, and laugh'd.
Alack! the credit due to seers,
Too well is known to my compeers!

Our travellers gain'd the farther shore
Of dark Loch-Ow, by dint of oar;
And there the tidings met their ear,
Of deeds of darkness, and of weir,

Which made the holy father weep,
And the rude boor to laugh, and leap,
And shout, with joy and clamour vast,
" M'Houston finds a home at last!
A vagrant outcast though he be,
This is the land he loves to see!"—

By Connel's tide they journey'd then,
And met whole multitudes of men;
Some fleeing to the forest land,
Some guarding firm, with sword in hand,
Each path, and ford, that lay between
Their fierce invaders and their queen.
For much had happ'd, that I must tell,
And you must read, if you do well.

END OF BOOK THIRD.

QUEEN HYNDE.

BOOK FOURTH.

QUEEN HYNDE.

BOOK FOURTH.

O FAIN would I borrow the harp of that land,
Where the dark sullen eagle broods over the strand,
Afar in his correi, where shrub never grew,
Or mounts on bold pinion away from the view,
On beams of the morning to journey alone,
And peal his loud matin where echoes are none—
The harp of that region of storm and of calm,
To mount with the eagle, or sport with the lamb;
To warble in sunshine, in discord to jar,
And roar in the tempest of nature or war.
Of that have I need, and but that I'll have none,
To sound the memorial of old Beregon.

The city is crowded, each alley and hall;
Loud rattles the scabbard on pavement and wall.
The bow and broad arrow of Scythia are there,
And files of bright lances gleam high in the air;
They flash and they flicker, so dazzling and high,
Like streamers of steel on the fields of the sky;
But nigher survey them, how deep is their stain!
That redness is not with the drops of the rain;
Proud badges of battle, depart they must never,
But there as memorials fester for ever.
Our clans and the Norsemen nor beckon nor smile,
As file meets with column, and column with file;
Yet still there was bustle by night and by day,
And ne'er were the maids of green Albyn so gay:
But many a sad mother to Heaven appeals;
And from the old warrior the groan often steals,
As from his high turrets he sees with despair
The Black Bull of Norway pawing the air.
Queen Hynde waits the issue, submissive and dumb,
And noble King Eric with love is o'ercome.

King Eric came over, a conqueror proved;
A kingdom he wanted, a kingdom beloved:

The queen was an item he did not imply,
But the conqueror fell at the glance of her eye.
His proffer was made as a lure to the land,
For woman he loved not, nor woman's command:
The name of a hero was all his delight;
His sword was a meteor unmatch'd in the fight;
The north he had conquer'd, and govern'd the whole,
From Dwina's dark flood to the waves of the pole;
And ne'er in his course had he vanquished been,
Till now, by a young Caledonian queen.
But thou, gentle maiden, to whom I appeal,
Who never hast felt, what thou could'st not conceal,
Love's dearest remembrance, that brought with the sigh
The stound to the heart, and the tear to the eye—
O, ill canst thou judge of the mighty turmoil
In the warrior's bosom, thus caught in the toil!

For the queen kept the words of her father in view,
Who charged, that, in secret, no lover should sue;
And therefore bold Eric was still kept at bay,
For all his impatience, and all he could say:
And this was his answer, both early and late,
"The time is at hand that determines my fate:

Then he whose arm in battle is strongest,
Whose shield is broadest, or falchion longest,
And twice in the lists shall win the day,
I am his to claim and carry away.
But till that day all suit is vain—
In strict retirement I remain."—

Ah! princely Haco, woe for thee!
What hopest thou round these towers to see,
Which still thou circlest morn and even,
With cheek and eye upturn'd to heaven,
Or rather to each casement high
In Selma's towers for answering eye?
And thou hast seen it, though at more
Than fifty fathoms from the shore:
And who can eye of maiden fair
Read more than half way up the air?
The glance of love, the blushing hue,
Are lost amid the hazy blue:
But other signs—As, snowy veil
Rear'd high aloft like streamer pale;
A helmet waved in queenly hand;
A dazzling glance from gilded brand,

Whose point is turned north away,
Where Eric's camp like city lay.

These signals boded nothing good,
And scarce could be misunderstood.
A thousand times Prince Haco bow'd,
And humblest gratitude avow'd ;
He kiss'd his hand, then kneel'd profound,
And thrust his sword's point in the ground,
In homage to that virgin queen,
For such he deem'd capricious Wene ;
And *she* it was. But what she knew,
That thus such signals out she threw,
Or if 'twas all a freakish jest,
Nor friend nor foeman ever wist.

But as it was, it gave the alarm
Unto the prince to watch and arm.
His was a brave and goodly train,
The pride of Norway's stormy reign.
All youths on fame and honour bent,
And all of noble, proud descent,

Who the high heir of Eric's crown,
As path to fortune and renown,
Had follow'd with supreme good will,
Claiming the post of honour still;
And, sooth, a comelier warrior train
Ne'er mounted wave of northern main.

To these he said, in secret guise,
With looks profound and shrewdly wise,
" I dread these coward Scots for ill;
There has been bustling on that hill,
As if some treachery were design'd,
Or some misprision in the wind:
Scouts have been running up and down,
From town to camp, from camp to town."
(For an encampment, strong and high,
The Scots had form'd on Valon-Righ.)
" 'Tis meet that we should arm and watch,
Such violators first to catch,
If such there be. If I am wrong,
Our silent watch will not be long;
While, should we baulk some foul surprise,
Our fame to Odin's throne will rise."—

His warriors arm'd with youthful pride,
But laugh'd full mirthfully aside;
And wonder'd where their gallant prince
Caught such enormous sapience.

Meantime the troops of various climes
Met in the city lanes betimes;
And there they crowded, trading, bustling,
Till eventide, full rudely justling.
They met, they scowl'd—then, rushing, mingled,
While their rude weapons jarr'd and jingled.
Few words were changed for ill or good;
For why? They were not understood:
But many brazen looks said plain,
"Friend, you and I may meet again!"

In short, throughout each Highland clan
A spirit most indignant ran.
They could not brook their foes to see
Parade their streets unawed and free;
And from their cliff-borne camp they view'd
The march of these barbarians rude,

Beneath their feet, from day to day,
Like tigers growling o'er their prey.

Nor wanted there, the chiefs among,
Some fiery heads, that, right or wrong,
Would blow this breeze into a storm.
First of these chiefs was Donald Gorm,
Whose spirit, like the waves that roar
For ever on his stormy shore,
Was ne'er at ease by night or day,
But restless and perturb'd as they.
Among the clansmen of his name,
Revenge was his perpetual theme,
Until so fierce his fury burn'd,
His sovereign's faith aside was spurn'd;
And, if to join him there was none,
He'd break the truce, and fight alone!—

"We'll go," said Donald, "in the night,
And seize this king of boasted might;
And first we'll bind him heel to head,
And bear him to our rock with speed;

And then we'll turn, and kill, and kill,
And spoil, and ravage, at our will!
That cumbrous host we well may dread,
With doughty Eric at its head;
But, rend that moving spring away,
And down it falls the spoiler's prey.
What boots it me, a maiden's vow,
Vouchsafed I see not why, nor how?
If Donald this achievement grand
Performs by dint of shield and brand,
He reigns the King of fair Scotland!"—
"God bless the mark!" said every tongue,
And every sword on buckler rung.

King Eric's camp was scann'd with care,
For sundry spies went sauntering there.
But so it happ'd, that Haco's tent
Surpass'd the king's in ornament.
The prince's proud battalions lay
Round his with streamers soaring gay,
And golden crests, and herald show;
So that the spies went to and fro,

Staring aghast; then back they sped,
And, with sagacity inbred,
Declared, and swore, with gaping wonder,
That all the kings of the earth were yonder!

This was a prize, we may suppose,
Too rich for Donald Gorm to lose:
So straight was pass'd the order high,
That all the men of Mull and Skye,
And Moidart too, themselves should dight
In arms at dead hour of the night,
And follow, where their chief should lead,
To enterprize of glorious meed.

The harp had ceased in Selma's hall,
And from her towers, and turrets tall,
No glimmering torch or taper shone—
For they had died out one by one,
Like fading stars, whose time was spent
Above the airy firmament.

Many a bard on Valon-Righ
Had sung his song of victory,

And gone to rest—or converse hold
With spirits of the bards of old.
The cymbal's clang, the bugle's swell,
The trumpet's blare, the bagpipe's yell,
Had ceased, and silence reign'd alone
Around the skirts of Beregon,
Where thousands lay, stretch'd on the soil,
Panting for battle and for broil.

But Donald Gorm had other scheme
Than thus on battle clang to dream:
He panted for the waking fight,
The blood and havoc of the night;
The silent rush on prostrate foe;
The stroke, the stab, the overthrow;
Their mortal terror, flight, and thrall,
And captive king—the best of all!
A thousand times, with grin and growl,
Did Donald curse the minstrel's howl;
Then roll'd him on his russet floor,
And rail'd against the lagging hour.

For every minute in its flight,
From evening till the noon of night,
Was fetter laid on Donald's might.

The hour arrived,—as hour must come
To those that dread it for their doom,
As well as those who for it long,—
And Donald's men, in phalanx strong,
Moved from the cliff around the steep
With swiftness, and in silence deep.
Then Haco's watcher by the tarn
Straight hasted back, his prince to warn;
And found him and his troop prepared,
Couch'd on their arms, and keeping guard,
Hid in the heather and the brake,
Alongst the road the Scots must take.

Down came the Skye-men like a torrent,
Foaming, and muttering terms abhorrent;
Furious they came, with whirl and crush,
As midnight tides through narrows rush;

Or, when the storm is at the sorest,
Like wild bulls rushing from the forest,
With grinding hoof, and clattering horn,
And hollow humming as in scorn,—
So rush'd this phalanx multiform,
Led by the headlong Donald Gorm.

The front bore on swift as the wind,
But Haco's gallants closed behind;
And Donald's rear was levell'd low,
As fast as blow could follow blow.
His front pour'd on from tent to tent,
And robb'd and romaged as they went;
While those behind, without a blow,
Were chased and routed by the foe.
Right over ditch, and foss, and fen,
Was Donald borne by his own men;
For all his boast of warrior deed,
He ne'er got blow at foeman's head.

O Donald Gorm, hard fate is thine!
Exposed to punishment condign.

The truce is broke, and thou hast lost
One-fifth of all thy gallant host.
The daring deed thou canst not hide;
Thy kinsmen vanish'd from thy side,
And shame imprinted on thy brow.
Ha! Donald Gorm, what think'st thou now?

To-morrow all will be in flame,
And only thou must bear the blame;
For thou hast dared thy country's troth,
Thy sovereign's honour, and her oath,
Thus rashly, rudely, to deface;
And all for nought but deep disgrace.
Over thy head there broods a storm
Will blast thy honours, Donald Gorm!

But one thing yet thou dost not know:
Thou hadst to deal with generous foe,
Who sorrow'd at thy rash ado—
A hero, and a lover too;
Who dared not this thy deed proclaim,
Lest royal Hynde should bear the blame.

When past was all the hasty fray,
And Donald Gorm thus chased away;
And not one son of Norway miss'd,
Excepting Odin's sacred priest,
Whom Donald's men had caught asleep,
And hurried off unto the steep,—
They deem'd him chief of high command,
Some ancient lord of Scania's land;—
When fled, I say, that headlong force,
Prince Haco call'd his counsellors.—
"My gallant friends," said he, "I must
Rejoice to find in whom I trust.
This night you've shewn, with courage true,
What youths of noble blood can do,—
Have saved our sovereign's sacred life,
And crush'd at once a dangerous strife.
Now, trust me, we'll more credit win
By hushing this with little din,
Than, by ostent and fulsome boast,
To break the truce with Albyn's host,
And lose at once the glorious right
Of gaining all by heroes' might.

By secret trust full well I know
The treachery bred with private foe,
That gave us chance thus to debel.
This thing I know, but dare not tell.

" Then let us strip these savage slain,
And sink their bodies in the main ;
And pass the whole with answer brief,
As enterprize of robber chief ;
A trivial thing, of no regard,
Unsuiting honours or reward."—
Each gallant thought as Haco did,
Although his motives still were hid.

The slain were heap'd upon a team,
And in the sea, to sink or swim,
Their bodies hurl'd without delay ;
And all was o'er by break of day.
Then such a stir arose at dawn—
Torrents of blood like rivers ran ;
But none could tell who was to blame,
Or whence the purple deluge came.

Amazement fill'd the Norway men;
They gather'd round in thousands ten;
Until the king all patience lost,
And call'd a muster of his host.
No one was miss'd in all the lists,
Save one of Odin's sacred priests!

King Eric, as a monarch brave,
Of priestcraft was the very slave.
This omen dire his soul oppress'd;
He caught the terror of the rest,
And orders gave, in sullen mood,
For sacrifice of human blood.

Haco was grieved; for in that rite
He had no trust—took no delight;
And therefore told all that had pass'd
Unto the king, from first to last;
But chiefly dwelt on signal, seen
From casement of the Scottish queen.

Now hush'd were Eric's false alarms:
He caught his nephew in his arms;

For his big heart impetuous strove
With throes of glory and of love;
And thrice he bless'd his hero young,
Who thus withheld the blabbing tongue
From telling of a deed of fame,
That added lustre to his name.
Then said, " No favour he could crave,
That, as reward, he should not have."—

The prince of this laid hold, and said,
" My king and uncle, then I plead,
That I to-morrow be allow'd
The honour and distinction proud,
Within the lists with thee to stand,
A champion for my native land.
And thou in Haco's deeds shalt trace
The might of Odin's heavenly race."

The king now frown'd in sullen mood,
Nor tried his promise to elude.
Generous, as absolute in sway,
And downright as the light of day,

He all at once, in terms uncouth,
Reproved the madness of the youth :—

" Thou tendril of a rampant plant!
Darest thou to ask, or I to grant,
A thing that throws from my right hand
The glory of my native land?
What would my well-tried champions say
Were I to fling such prize away,
And all our soaring hopes destroy,
For the wild frenzy of a boy?
Thy rash, fond aim full well I see—
Thou think'st the choice will fall on thee.
Dare not to raise such lofty looks;
Eric but ill a rival brooks;
And thus to sacrifice his all,
He may not, and he never shall."—

" My liege, I had your sacred word,
Given fully, of your own accord;
I ween'd on that I might rely.
Can Odin's son his troth deny?

I claim it; and to-morrow stand,
To win, or fall, at thy right hand.
Thy word is given; if broke it be
By Thor, the breaker fights with me!"—

"Haco, thou art a noble stem,
That well should brook the diadem.
My sacred word I must fulfil,
Though grievously against my will.
By one rash promise I am cross'd,
And all my fame in battle lost.
How dare I in myself confide
With such a stripling by my side?
For should'st thou fall, or wounded be,
Farewell to Eric's victory!
But, at the hour the heralds name,
Come, and the post of honour claim
As right of thy illustrious line.
My word is pass'd, and it is thine."—

Turn we to Donald of the Isle,
In sad dilemma placed the while;

To censure subject, for th' abuse
Of sovereign's faith, and broken truce.
He kept his place in outer ward,
To fight with friend or foe prepared;
And much he wonder'd, when he saw
The armies mix, as if no flaw,
Or breach of contract, had been known.
Still Donald kept his hold alone,
Till Eric's muster-roll was o'er,
And freedom reign'd as theretofore.—

"'Tis strange," said Donald, "should this breach
And foul defeat the throne not reach.
It would appear there is no blame
Attach'd to queen's or liegeman's name;
Therefore I judge it best at once
The daring outrage to renounce;
And prove it, swear it, though they should
Deny it all through fire and blood."—

"Dear master, know, your gallant men
Amid King Eric's camp lie slain."—

" There let them lie; I'll flatly swear
They are not mine, nor ever were."—

" Your clan is short. What will you say,
When call'd out on a muster-day?"—

" I'll say, the men of Mull are gone
To fetch supplies of venison;
To see their dames, and shun the strife;
And all have forfeited their life."—

" The priest of Odin, in our thrall,
Will broad disclosure make of all."—

" Were he the devil's priest array'd,
One whom I more than Odin dread,
I'd let him blood, and make his bed
Full fifty feet below my tread,
Rather than he should blab disgrace
On great M'Ola's royal race.
My fathers had one liberal form,
Which stands unbroke by Donald Gorm—

It is, that neither old nor young,
Nor oath pronounced by human tongue,
Shall e'er a rest or bearing find
Between his honour and the wind.
Come, and the secret thou shalt know,
How the old dotard brooks the blow."—

The chief and bard together went
In to the priest, with foul intent.
The old man rested on the floor,
With lip of scorn, and look demure:
His ankles were by withe entwined;
His arms were cross'd, and bound behind;
His grisly beard seem'd scarce terrene—
It flow'd, like Centaur's shaggy mane,
Far o'er his girdle crimosin,
And quiver'd to his palsied chin.
A portrait of majestic scorn
Was that old heathen priest forlorn,
With eye fix'd on his galling yoke,
And leaning calmly to the rock.—

" Father, full froward was the fate,
That cast thee in this captive state,"
Said Donald, with affected grief;
" But here comes one to bring relief;
Since mighty Odin hides his face,
And there's no other eye of grace,
This is the boon thy God sends thee—
A thirsty brand to set thee free!"—

" Beware, thou sanguine, savage chief,
Slave to a new and fond belief!—
Beware how thou upliftest sword,
Or utter'st rash or ruthless word,
Against the lowest holy guide
To Odin's service sanctified.
Know'st thou who measures mortal age?
Who loves the battle's lofty rage
And riots mid the overthrow,
In wreaking vengeance on each foe?
Even HE, whose servant for his sin
Lies chain'd thy hateful power within.
Then be thou ware, the crime eschew,
Nor do a deed thou sore shalt rue."—

" Speak, Rimmon, bard of Turim's hall ;
What think'st thou of this heathen's fall ?"—

" Thou lord of that romantic land,
The winged isle, of steep and strand ;
And all the creeks of brake and fern,
Those pathless piles, so dark and dern,
That stretch from Sunart's sombre dell,
To Duich's heights of moor and fell ;
Thou stem of royal seed—nay, more,
Son of an hundred kings of yore !
Unto thy servant deign regard ;
—Woe to the chief that slights his bard !

" I've heard an adage in my time,
A simple old Milesian rhyme,
Which bore, that, whatsoever god
Was worshipp'd all the world abroad,
From him that reigns in heaven alone,
Unto the gods of wood and stone—
That, still among each erring crew,
These gods should have a reverence due ;

Because, in offering insult there,
A nation's feelings injured are ;
And man's deep curse, when insults move
His sacred feelings to disprove,
Is next to that of God's above.
I say no more ; but that I've found
These ancient sayings often sound."—

Donald look'd down with dark grimace,
And primm'd his mouth, and held his peace ;
And rather seem'd disposed to show
Relenting heart o'er prostrate foe.
But as imprudence in th' extreme,
Or dire mischance, (a gentler name,)
Suggested, the old priest began
To brave the spirit of the man ;
And his o'erbearing pride defy,
By brief and threatening prophecy.—

" 'Tis known," said he, " o'er all the lands
Where Odin's heavenly sway expands,
That whosoever dares enthrall
The meanest guide unto his hall,

Or move a tongue his faith to upbraid,
Or hand against his sacred head,
That sinner's blood shall first be spilt
Of all his kindred's, for his guilt.
Therefore I dare the whole degrees
Of those who bow to Oaken Trees;
Or to the dazzling God of Day;
Or Moon, that climbs the milky way;
Or to that God, mysterious, mild,
That died and lived, the virgin's child—
I dare you all, by curse unheard,
To wrong a hair of this grey beard;
Or down to Lok the caitiff goes,
The first of Odin's fated foes."—

"So be the offence and the reward!
Thou speak'st to one that ne'er was dared,"
Said Donald, as he rose amain,
Trembling with anger and disdain;
And ere his bard a word could say
His master's vengeance to allay,
Cursing and foaming in his rage,
Sheer to the belt he clove the sage;

To either side one half did bow,
His head and breast were cleft in two;
An eye was left on either cheek,
And half a tongue, to see, and speak.
O never was so vile a blow,
Or such a bloody wreck of woe!

Old Rimmon bow'd upon his knee;
And, that such sight he might not see,
Shaded his eyes with his right hand,
And pour'd forth coronach so grand,
O'er the old stranger's mournful fate,
That Donald Gorm became sedate;
And soften'd was his frown severe,
To stern regret and sorrow drear;
But his stout heart not to belie,
He dash'd the round tear from his eye;
Then turn'd, and wiped his bloody glaive,
And bade to dig the heathen's grave
Far in the bowels of the hill,
And with huge rocks the crevice fill,
That forth he might not win at all,
To blab in Odin's heavenly hall;

For, sooth, whate'er was doom'd to be,
He would that boisterous deity
Might lay his bloody guerdons by
For those who own'd his sovereignty.
Sore trembled Turim's ancient bard,
For the rash deed his lord had dared;
And, the transgression to redeem,
Sung a most solemn requiem.

Of Donald's nightly overthrow
No note was taken by the foe;
For, yielding to the generous prince,
King Eric slyly blink'd the offence.
Those strangers both were sway'd by love;
And hoped before the queen to prove
Their heroism, and matchless might,
And claim unto her hand by right.
But either mighty Odin heard
His dying servant's last award,
Or some all-seeing righteous eye
Beheld the ancient father die.

To Eric's tent that night were call'd,
Priest, prophet, patriarch, and scald;
And thence were heard, in thundering jar,
Loud anthems to the god of war.
And when the orisons were said,
And victims on the altar laid,
And rose the frenzy to the full,
With cup drunk from an enemy's skull;
Then blood was dash'd on all around,
As text, or omen, to expound;
And, that survey'd with much grimace,
The victory given to Odin's race.

Again the frenzied song of war
On the night breeze was borne afar,
Till, on the dark and gelid rock,
The drowsy cormorant awoke,
And, moved by wonder and dismay,
Scream'd out in concert with the lay.
Some sentinels that watched nigh,
On the north cliff of Valon-Righ,
Descended softly to the plain,
And overheard the closing strain:

And thus it ran, the roundelay,
As near as Scottish tongue could say.

Song.

Veil up thy heaven
From morning till even,
With darkness thy throne surrounding,
Whenever thy wrath
At the foes of our faith,
Thou shewest in gloom confounding.

Roll up the thunder,
Thy right hand under,
And the snow and the hail up treasure;
And gather behind
The tempest of wind;—
All weapons of thy displeasure.

Dreadfully pouring,
Rending, and roaring,
Send them with vengeance loaden,

That all below
May tremble to know
There's none so mighty as Odin!
There's none so mighty as Odin!
There's none so mighty as Odin!
That all below
May tremble, and know
There's none so mighty as Odin! &c.

The combat-day arrived at last,
And with it congregations vast
Of maidens, youths, and aged men,
From isle, from dale, and Highland glen;
All panting, burning, to survey
The deeds of that eventful day.
And every group, disputing, came,
Who were the warriors first in fame:
For every clan avow'd its head
Unmatch'd in might and warrior deed—
One 'gainst a world to throw the gage,
The master spirit of the age!
Full plain it was to eye and ear,
That chose to see, and chose to hear,

That no three lords the land could call
Would satisfaction give to all.

That morning rose in ruddy hue,
So bright, that all the fields of dew,
The gleaming mountains, and the wood,
Appear'd one mighty waste of blood;
Even the slow billow of the main
Appear'd to heave and roll in pain—
A clammy, viscous, purple tide,
That murmur'd to the mountain side,
And broke, with harsh and heavy groan,
Upon the beach of Beregon.
The sages look'd with wistful eye
Upon the flush'd and frowning sky;
Then on the purpled earth and sea,
And sigh'd a prayer internally.

But scarcely had the morning's prime
Flamed o'er the mountain's top sublime,
Ere sable shades began to spread,
And mingle with the murky red;

The sun glared through a curtain gray
With broaden'd face and blunted ray,
And short way had he left the rath
Upon his high and gloomy path,
Till nought appear'd to human sight
But a small speck of watery light,
That seem'd above the rack to fly,
Careering through a troubled sky.

Dark and more dark the morning frown'd;
At length the shadows closed around,
Until the noontide of the day
Look'd like a twilight, in dismay.
'Twas like that interval of gloom
'Twixt death and everlasting doom,
When the lorn spirit, reft away
From its frail tenement of clay,
Is forced through wastes of night to roam,
In search of an eternal home—
That space of terror, hope, and dole,
The awful twilight of the soul.

Alas! what earthly anxiousness
Resembles such a pause as this?
But mortal tremor and alarm,
For the success of foeman's arm,
And for the congregating gloom,
That almost threaten'd nature's doom,
Were never moved to wilder scope
Than on that day of fear and hope.

In Eric's council was no flaw,
His will was rule, his word was law;
But in the Scottish camp there grew
A furious general interview.
There was no lord, nor chief of name,
Who put not in conclusive claim,
As his the right the brand to wield
Upon the glorious combat-field.
After great heat, in proud deport,
With stern arraignment and retort,
Resource or remedy was none,
But that of casting lots alone;
A base alternative, 'twas true,
But that, or battle, nought would do.

The lots were cast with proper form,
And fell on Mar, and Donald Gorm,
And Allan Bane, of wide command,
The goodliest knight in fair Scotland.

Mar's name was call'd throughout the crowd;
The men of Dee hurra'd aloud;
But those of Athol and Argyle
Look'd to the earth, with hem, and smile;
While Moray lads, with envy stung,
Cursed in a broad unfashion'd tongue.

Brave Donald Gorm was not proclaim'd.
Gods, how the men of Morven flamed!
And those of Rannoch and Loch-Ow
Pull'd the blue bonnet o'er the brow,
And mutter'd words of scorn and hate,
Lamenting Albyn's hapless fate;
While through the clans of Ross there pass'd
A murmur like the mountain blast.

Each neighbouring clan was moved to scorn,
That such a chance from it was torn

Of royal sway, and warrior boast,
And given to those they hated most.
While distant tribes forbore to foam,
Pleased that it came no nigher home.

But when the name of Allan Bane,
Lochaber's calm and mighty thane,
Was call'd, there was no grumbling sound,
Nor aught but plaudits floated round.
The gather'd thousands seem'd to feel,
That heaven had chosen for their weal;
For lord was none, in sway, or fame,
In all the land, of equal name.

The ring was form'd above the bay,
Where Eric's ships incumbent lay;
Its circle measured furlongs ten,
One half inclosed by Norway-men,
While all the Scots rank'd on the lea,
Between the city gate and sea;
And 'twixt the hosts, from east to west,
Strong ramparts, lined with guards, were placed.

The seven towers of Beregon
Were clothed and crowded every one.
High soaring o'er the sordid strife,
Unmeasured piles of mortal life,
Breathing, and moving, frown'd they there,
Like cloudy pyramids of air.

Both friends and foemen turn'd their eyes
To these pilasters of the skies,
And almost ween'd the living towers,
The altars of the heavenly powers,
The tabernacles of the skies,
Where angels offered sacrifice,
With victims heap'd of shadowy forms,
Above the pathway of the storms,
Up render'd from some dread abode,
The foes of men and foes of God;
And there piled for some dire cremation,
Some final, horrid immolation.

The whole of that momentous scene
Was such as on this earth again

The eye of man can never see,
On this side of eternity.
The various nations arm'd and filed;
The thousands round on summits piled,
Of rock, of ravelin, and mast;
The sky with darkness overcast;
And when the trumpet's rending blare
Bade champions to their posts repair,
Ten times ten thousand panting breasts
Were quaking, yearning, o'er the lists;
Ten thousand hearts with ardour burn'd;
Ten thousand eyes were upward turn'd,
Trying to pierce the fields of air;
But there was nought but darkness there!
What could they do but mutter vow,
And turn their eyes again below?

King Eric, and his champions twain,
Enter'd the lists the first. And then
Appear'd the Scottish heroes three,
Arm'd and accoutred gallantly.
But when they met to measure swords,
And change salute in courteous words,

From the Scots files there rose a groan;
For far, in stature, and in bone,
The Norse excell'd; so far, indeed,
That theirs appear'd of pigmy breed.

The heroes measured sword and shield;
Then to their various stations wheel'd;
And just when ready to begin,
Prince Haco sprung like lightning in,
Kneel'd to the king, and made demand
To fight that day at his right hand,
As his the right by heritage.
The champions boded Eric's rage,
And gazed at Haco. But anon
King Eric bade the knight begone
From his right hand, with kingly grace,
And the young hero took his place.
A mighty clamour rent the air,
And shook the loaded atmosphere;
He was, forsooth, a comely sight,
In golden armour burnish'd bright,
And raiment white, all glittering sheen
With gems of purple and of green.

With face so fair, and form so tall,
So courteous, and so young withal,
He seem'd, amid the multitude,
Like sun-beam through a darksome cloud.

Among the shouts that scaled the shower,
A shriek was heard from Selma's tower.
Far upward Haco turn'd his eye,
And saw, far in the hollow sky,
A female form of radiant white
Upheld, and fainting with affright;
But soon she waved a snowy veil,
The prince's cheek grew red, then pale;
And with rash hand, and streaming eye,
He heaved his golden helmet high.
King Eric gave him stern reproof,
And warn'd him to his post aloof;
But his fond heart, with burning glow,
Was roused to more than man might do;
He trod on air; he grasp'd at fame;
His sword a meteor seem'd of flame.

The king was match'd with lordly Mar;
And Allan Bane with Osnagar,
A Dane of most gigantic form;
And the brave prince with Donald Gorm.
The marshals walk'd the circle round,
Survey'd the lists, and vantage ground;
Then raised a signal over head,
The baleful flag of bloody red.
The trumpet sounded once; and then
Bugle and tabour roll'd amain
O'er all the host with rending swell;
Till slumbering echoes caught the knell,
And, calling to the mountain side,
Proclaim'd the combat far and wide.

The trumpet gave the second boom;
Again the clamour rent the gloom!
It gave the third.—No murmur ran!
No sound moved by the breath of man
O'er all that collied, countless throng;
For trembling feelings, fierce, and strong,
Oppress'd them all.—Blench'd was each cheek,
And lip; that moved, but durst not speak.

The triple combat then began;
That instant man was match'd to man;
And at that very moment flew
From out the cloud the lightning blue;
The thunder follow'd, and the hail
Came like a torrent with the peal,
Straight in the faces of the three
Who fought for Albyn's liberty.
The priests and scalds of Scania raised
The stormy hymn, and Odin praised;
But Albyn's thousands, blinded quite
With hail, and sleet, and glancing light,
To covert fled in dire dismay,
Trembling and faltering by the way;
All ignorant of what befell,
And asking news which none could tell.

But not the wrath of angry heaven,
The storm with tenfold fury driven,
The forked flames, with flash and quiver,
The thunder that made earth to shiver,
Could daunt the courage of the brave,
Who fought for glory, or the grave.

No stately marshal was allow'd,
Nor umpire, verging from the crowd,
To meddle with the mortal strife;
Each hero fought for death or life.
Few words on either side were spoke,
To daunt opponent, or provoke.
For why? The storm so fiercely jarr'd,
They neither could be said nor heard.
Their weapons met with clanging blows,
And high from helm and buckler rose.
Mar lost his ground, as Eric press'd;
But calmly still the king regress'd.
With foe before, and foe behind,
To quit his line he had no mind,
And vantage of the rain and wind.

'Tween Osnagar and Allan Bane
The fight was dreadful. But the Dane,
With every vantage of the field,
Eluded Allan's oval shield,
And pierced his shoulder to the bone,
Reddening his arm and hacqueton.

This roused the Scottish hero so,
That back he bore his giant foe;
And it was plain to every eye,
Though few there were that could espy,
That Albyn, in her Allan Bane,
Would suffer no dishonest stain.

Ha! mighty Donald of the main,
Why flagg'st thou on the battle-plain?
Why is thy bronzed cheek aghast,
And thy fierce visage overcast?
Can thunder's roar, or fire, or storm,
Appal the heart of Donald Gorm,
Who, till this hour, at danger spurn'd,
Whose sword in battle ne'er was turn'd?
No—But there had been boding sight!
Some dreadful visitant o'ernight!
And now the hero powerless seem'd,
And fought as if he slept and dream'd.

When Haco first met eye to eye
With the impetuous Lord of Skye,

One thought alone possess'd the host.
Even Eric deem'd his nephew lost;
And only kept proud Mar at bay,
To watch the issue of the day.
Haco strode up with giddy pace,
And shook his brand in Donald's face.
The day had shortly been, forsooth,
If such a fair and flexile youth
Had shook a gilded sword or spear
At that imperious islander—
Heavens! how the tempest's howling breath
Had heighten'd been by Donald's wrath!
Whereas he now to battle fared,
As if he neither saw nor heard.

Haco made play, and join'd, and sprung
From side to side, like galliard young.
Now on his golden shield he clang'd;
Now on his foeman's buckler bang'd;
Now back, now forward, would he fly,
In hopes to catch a royal eye.
But all the feints he could perform
Were lost on drowsy Donald Gorm;

Though life and death were laid in stake,
He held his guard as scarce awake.

The prince grew reckless and surprised,
Thinking his foeman him despised;
And, pressing down that sluggish brand,
He closed with Donald, hand to hand.
Then did a furious course ensue,
Of push and parry, hack and hew;
Until the prince, in sidelong bound,
Gave Donald's thigh a ghastly wound.
Then burst the chief's inherent ire
Forth like the blaze of smother'd fire.
Alas! 'twas bravery's parting qualm,
The rending blast before the calm;
The last swoln billow in the bay,
When winds have turn'd another way.—

" Curse on thy wanton slight!" he cried,
" Thou gossip for a maiden's side!
And curse upon the wizard charm,
That thus hath chain'd M'Ola's arm,

Whose pristine might and majesty
Were framed to punish ten like thee !
Here's to thy foppish heart abhorr'd !
Ward, if thou may'st, this noble sword.
Hence to thy ghostly charlatan,
And bear him back his curse and ban ;
And say, that I'll requite it well,
In whate'er place he dares to dwell—
In earth, in cloud, in heaven or hell !"—

Thus saying, Donald forward flung,
And at the prince his weapon swung
With back and forward sweep amain ;
But only fought the wind and rain,
Or thing invisible to man.
He toil'd, he wheel'd, and forward ran ;
But not one stroke, for all his fume,
So much as levell'd Haco's plume ;
Or downward on his buckler rang ;
Or made his golden helmet clang.
His rage seem'd madness in th' extreme—
The struggle of a frenzied dream.

The prince kept guard, but smiled to see
The wildness of his enemy.
At length, with flourish, and with spring
Forward, like falcon on the wing,
He pierced the raving maniac's side.
Forth well'd the warm and purple tide;
And, like an oak before the storm,
Down crash'd the might of Donald Gorm.
A shout from Norway's files too well
Proclaim'd the loss Scot dared not tell.—

" True son of Odin!" Eric cried,
And rush'd on Mar with madden'd stride.
" Presumptuous lord! What thing art thou
That comest King Eric's ire to brow?
Would that I had (if such there be)
A score of Scottish lords like thee!
With dint of this good sword of mine,
I'd heap them all on Odin's shrine!"—
So saying, at one dreadful blow,
He shear'd the warrior's helm in two,
With lightning's force.—The Scottish lord
Lies prostrate o'er his bloodless sword.

By this time giant Osnagar
Was from his station borne afar,
And sore by Allan Bane oppress'd;
Heaved like the sea his ample chest!
His hand unto his weapon clave—
Scarce could he wield that weighty glaive.
He in his targe to trust began,
For blood o'er all his armour ran;
And, as he wore from side to side,
Most bitterly to Odin cried.
One other minute in the strife,
And Osnagar had yielded life;
But to that goal when Allan press'd,
Two other swords met at his breast.—
"Yield!" cried King Eric, "yield, or fall!"—
"I never did, and never shall!"
The chief replied.—But Eric's arm
Waved back his friends from farther harm.—

"Most generous king, I will not yield,
Nor living quit the combat-field:
Come one, come all, this arm to try—
Here do I stand, to win or die.

Shall it be told on Lochy's side,
That Allan Bane for rescue cried?"—

King Eric smiled, and made reply:—
" Thou bear'st thyself most gallantly;
We're three to one, and doubly strong;
But none shall gallant foeman wrong:
Then yield thee to a king this day,
Whose sword in battle ne'er gave way."—

" For once it shall!" bold Allan cried,
And made a blow at Eric's side.—
" Hurra!" cried Eric joyfully;
" I'll trust this wight with none but me.
Keep all aloof, both friend and foe,
Till we two change a single blow.
His wayward will he needs must have,
Though he is one I fain would save."—

Clash went the swords, the bucklers clash'd,
And 'gainst each other soon were dash'd;
But short the strife, ere Allan Bane
Lay stunn'd upon the slippery plain,

Bereft of buckler and of brand,
But without wound from Eric's hand.
He was no more in Eric's clasp,
Than leopard in the lion's grasp.

The king upraised the wondering thane,
With soothing words and smiling mien;
Return'd his sword, and, as a charm,
Bound golden bracelet round his arm;
Then, in a bold, impatient strain,
These words address'd to Allan Bane:—

"Thou art as stout and staunch a knight
As ever braved our northern might;
But know thou this, (and when thou dost,
Thou know'st it to thy nation's cost,)
In youth, before this beard was brown,
Or only waved a golden down,
I, from a child to battle bred,
Was forth to single combat led;—
Before my eighteenth year, I say,
Had clothed this chin, which now is grey,

Within the lists I had to fight
For life, before my father's sight.
I won—and of applause was vain.
I've fought a thousand times since then;
In southern climes have laurels won,
Beyond the seasons and the sun;
I've journey'd all the world around,
Wherever fame was to be found;
Have fought with Frank and Turcoman,
With prince, with vizier, and with khan;
And though their painim creed I spurn'd,
This sword was ne'er in combat turn'd.

"The seventh day we fight again,
In triple combat, on the plain;
But as well may you challenge then
Great Odin, prince of gods and men,
Or brave that liquid fiery levin,
Red streaming from the forge of heaven,
Trying its power to countercharm,
As brave the force of Eric's arm.

" This tell the nobles of your land;
And say, I make sincere demand
Of them, ere more deray is done,
To yield the queen. I have her won.
I flinch not from my royal seal:
It is in friendship I appeal.
But should they wish again to just,
And in the second combat trust,
'Tis well; then henceforth I must claim
The guardship of the royal dame.
They have but choice 'twixt bad and worse;
I claim but what I'll take perforce.
One hour I wait return discreet—
The next I do as I think meet."—

By that time Mar had breathed his last,
And Donald Gorm approached fast
The bourn of all the human race;
Yet, in his stern and rugged face,
There seem'd no terror, wrath, or teen,
Save at some being all unseen.

When Haco raised him to his knee,
He look'd aside most movingly,
And to the wind these words address'd—
He saw nought but the slaughter'd priest!—

" Ay, thou may'st stand, and smile, and beck,
With thy half head on half a neck!
M'Ola soon shall be with thee,
His sworn and subtile enemy!
Thou basilisk of burning spheres!
Thou, and thy hellish, damn'd compeers,
With dreams, and visions of dismay,
And terrors of a future day—
With dreadful darkness, fire, and storm,
At last have vanquish'd Donald Gorm!
But some shall rue, since so it be.
Go to, go to—I'll be with thee."—

The hero turn'd his beamless eye
Toward the grisly peaks of Skye:
Some thought unfathom'd seem'd to hover
His dark departing spirit over—

Of roaming on his mountain wind,
Swifter than hawk or dappled hind;
Of stag-hound's bay, and bugles swelling,
And answering echoes bravely yelling.
But all was one distorted scene,
The vision of a soul in pain,
That trembled, neither bound nor free,
'Twixt time and immortality.
With that wild look, it fled for ever,
From hollow groan, and rigid shiver—
From clenched hand, and writhing brow.—
Eternal God!—What is it now?

END OF BOOK FOURTH.

QUEEN HYNDE.

BOOK FIFTH.

QUEEN HYNDE.

BOOK FIFTH.

O come, gentle maiden
Of queenly Dunedin,
Array'd in thy beauty and gladdening smiles;
Thine the control I list,
Lovely mythologist!
Thine the monition that never beguiles.

Over the mountain wave;
Over the hero's grave;
Over the darkness of ages gone by;
Be thou my inquirer,
And holy inspirer,
And keenly I'll follow the glance of thine eye.

But, bowing before thee,
Far most I implore thee,
When rapt in the strain that I love beyond measure;
That theme so ecstatic,
Sublime, and erratic,
The love of a maiden, the magnet of pleasure!

What were the sailor's joy,
Roll'd in his bavaroy,
Far in the gloom of the dark Polar sea;
What were the warrior's deed,
Minstrel, or monarch's meed,
What, without hope of approval from thee!

Thou gem of creation,
The world's admiration,
Thy mind is a mystery I cannot explore;
I'll love and caress thee,
Admonish and bless thee,
But sound the high tone of thy feelings no more.

The grey hairs of sorrow,
And dread of to-morrow,

Have bow'd down thy bard on his cold native lea;
Then list the last lay
Of the green braken brae,
The song is a medley, and model of thee.—

Queen Hynde's in her tower,
For the storm and the shower
Had driven the maidens within;
And shrouded the view
Of the anxious few
That yearn'd over the fates of their kin.

All trembling and pining,
The queen sat reclining,
She knew not what was befalling;
But she boded deep dismay,
For the shouts were far away,
And each sound through the storm was appalling.

One after one to the field she sent,
Who hasted away incontinent;

But out of the throng, the mire, and the rain,
No one return'd with the tidings again;
And the first that arrived was Allan Bane.
All sheeted in blood appear'd he there,
And his looks and his words were all despair.
King Eric's message in full he told,
And of his claim, the queen to hold;
Then vouch'd the boast of his warrior slight,
As far inferior to his might;
For he said, that " enchanter's mighty charm
Had given that force into his arm.
The combat was lost; no power to deliver!
And so would the next, and the next for ever."—

Perplexity reign'd in every face,
As every rankling pang kept place
In various breasts; one there might see
Anger, regret, temerity,
Hope, fear, contempt, elation, shame,
And every passion tongue can name,
All crowded on a darksome scene,
With scarce a ray of light between.

As ever you saw, on winter eve,
When the sun takes a joyless leave,
Descending on some distant coast,
Beyond the waste of waters lost,
The ocean's breast all overspread
With shades of green, and murky red,
With distant fields of sackcloth hue,
With pale, with purple, and with blue,
And every shade defined and strong,
Without one cheerful ray among;
And knew'st these spectres multiform,
The heralds of approaching storm:
So was it here. Proud Albyn's blood
Began to boil, the storm to brood;
Some blamed the preference by lot;
Nor were old jealousies forgot.
Some blamed the brave and wounded thane
Of brangle hurtful and insane;
And said, A thousand might be found
Would Eric beat, in Albyn's bound.
It was a scene of feud and dare,
As feudal councils always were.

Old Diarmid rose this feud to check,—
His reverend age insured respect,—
And thus he spoke :—" My sovereign dame,
And noble maids, and chiefs of fame,
Hard is our fate, whate'er the worth
Of this bold wooer of the north.
This city of our fathers' names
In one short hour may be in flames,
And with the thousands of our kin
That now are crowded it within,
Of every age, sex, and degree,
How dreadful would the sequel be !
King Eric's claim, confess I must,
Can scarcely be pronounced unjust ;
'Tis only that for which he fought,
Else he has staked his all for nought—
And should he win again, 'tis clear,
(And likely too from all we hear,)
If we such claim should disallow,
He has no more than he has now.
Therefore I deem, in such a case,
To save our gather'd populace,

We must to Eric straight present
Some pledge, some great equivalent,
If such there be; but as for more,
I said but as I said before,
The moment with our queen we part,
Our country's freedom we desert."—

"Forbid it, Heaven!" Queen Hynde replied,
"For me no warrior's hand be tied.
When I am gone, as go I must,
I in your patriot ardour trust,
That by your country's rights you stand,
Nor lose one jot for maiden's hand.
This hour I go, ere worse arrives,
To save my people's sacred lives."—

One buzz of disapproval ran
Around the hall, from man to man;
And all prepared to take the field;
To sell their lives, but not to yield
Their youthful queen; as, doing so,
They stoop'd unto a foreign foe.

As wilder still the uproar grew,
And nought but havoc was in view;
The city crowded perilously,
No room to fight, nor yet to flee;
Confusion, ruin, crowds aghast,
Defeat, and conflagration vast,
The certain consequence to be
Of this their fierce fidelity.

In this dilemma came relief;
Not from the clan of distant chief,
From friendly prince, nor subject isle,
But from a maiden's witching wile!
The restless Wene, since she had seen
Prince Haco, sore perplex'd had been;
And much she long'd for some deray,
To throw her in that hero's way,
Whose youthful arm, and sprightly form,
Had cow'd the might of Donald Gorm;
And hence her mind was wholly bent
On being with her mistress sent,
An hostage to King Eric's tent.

Now, when she saw the proud resolve
Of Albyn's chiefs would straight involve
The land in trouble, toil, and woe,
And all her measures overthrow,
Forthwith she rose with seemly grace,
And all her majesty of face,
And proffer'd, for her mistress' sake,
Her place of royalty to take;
And on the instant to go thence,
In such an adverse exigence.—

"Send me to Eric straight!" said she,
"In all the pomp of royalty;
With maids and pages at my beck,
Kneeling, and bowing with respect;
And loads of comfits, and of dress
Blazing in eastern sumptuousness.
His forward claim he may repent,
I'll queen it to his heart's content!
One only claim to make I choose,
Which as a king he can't refuse;
It is, that, as a virgin queen,
My face by man may not be seen,

Until the seven days are outrun,
And Albyn's chiefs have lost or won.
This for my country's sake I crave,
Now trembling o'er her freedom's grave;
And then I yield me to his hand,
An hostage for my native land.
To plague that king I have a mind;
If he's not sick of woman kind,
And, ere the seventh day, driven insane,
My name no more is Wicked Wene!"—

The courtiers smiled, as well they might,
And lauded much the maiden's sleight;
But sore they fear'd the plot would fail,
And do more mischief, than avail.
Wene's form was slight, her stature small,
The queen's majestically tall;
And, worst of all, the king had seen,
And held some converse with, the queen.

Wene smiled, and bade them nothing dread,
She should be taller by a head

Than Eric could of queenship guess;
She'd add one inch of wickedness,
And three of beauty, pride, and mind,
Should dazzle mighty Eric blind.
She'd swathe the braggart in amaze,
If not drive mad, in seven days.

Queen Hynde embraced the elf, and said,
No mistress e'er had such a maid;
And if success this effort crown'd,
She would for ever be renown'd;
For future bards, in many a strain,
Would sing the deeds of beauteous Wene.
And when a lover she should choose,
Her sovereign would no boon refuse;
While all her interest she might claim
To win a lord of noble fame.—

"Ohon an Banrigh!" sigh'd the elf;
"Preserve your interest for yourself,
My generous queen; for you may need
That and some more, in marriage speed.

For me, henceforth I'll use mankind
As I would do the passing wind—
To breathe upon, and bid it fly
Away from great important I!
Or to supply this ardent breast
With cooling laughter and with jest.
Interest! The proffer is sublime!
Come, let us go, we lose but time.
When from this presence I depart
In all the pomp of female art,
'Mid grandeur and respect to move,
I'll queen it mortal queens above."—

All present own'd with earnestness,
There was no mode so safe as this,
Save for the danger of the maid,
Of which she nothing seem'd afraid.
The queen assured them that she knew
The cunning of the lively shrew
Too well from trial, to suspect
That what she said she'd not effect.
Forthwith a herald went with speed
To Eric at his army's head,

Prepared to bathe their weapons' rust,
And lay old Beregon in dust.
Eric, with generous love inspired,
Conceded all the queen desired,
And straight made preparation high
For this most lovely prodigy—
This queen, of frame and soul refined,
Surpassing all of human kind!

Eastward the storm its course had traced,
To roar amid the Grampian waste,
In one dark elemental stole
These everlasting hills to roll;
And in that deep impervious cloud
Were roll'd, as in a hellish shroud,
The hail, the thunder, and the flame;
And ghastly shades, without a name,
Holding them all in order due,
Prepared the outrage to renew—
To sport them all in wild excess,
And riot in the wilderness.

Soon as that cloud had pass'd away,
Forth issued Wene, like meteor gay,
With music pealing on the wind,
And troops before, and troops behind;
Twelve pages, glancing all in green;
Twelve maidens, in their tartans sheen;
Twelve bards, who sung, in strains intense,
Their sovereign's great magnificence,
And deeds her ancestors had done,
Surpassing all beneath the sun.
All were sincere, you may believe't—
How oft poor minstrels are deceived!

In all the splendour of the morn,
The beauteous dame herself was borne
On high, a gilded throne within—
A lightsome, yielding palanquin;
Her form begirt with many a gem,
Her head with sparkling diadem;
A gauzy veil of snowy white,
Befringed with gold and silver bright,

Floated around her on the air,
Circling a form so passing fair,
So pure, so lovely, so benign,
It almost seem'd a thing divine.

Eric, array'd in warrior trim,
Surrounded by his nobles grim,
Came forth the royal dame to meet,
And with kind salutations greet.
Behind him shone a goodlier view—
Prince Haco and his retinue;
And he himself that train before,
Robed in the armour which he wore
That morn upon the sanguine field,
The golden helmet and the shield;
And in his youthful hand display'd
The golden hilt and bloody blade,
All saying, with full fond regard,
"See for your sake what I have dared!"
O how his ardent bosom pined
For one sweet glance, approving, kind,
Of the dear being he had seen,
And now his bosom's only queen!

Queen Wene approach'd with colours streaming,
Music sounding, lances gleaming,
Borne on high by gallant yeomen
Slowly forth to Albyn's foemen:
There stood Eric, smiling, bowing—
What a form for youthful wooing!
Bearded, dark, robust, and vigorous,
Stern, gigantic, blunt, and rigorous,
All his youthful manner over—
Such a man to play the lover!
'Mid such array, and such a scene,
And to such elf as Wicked Wene!

Wene, from her gilded chair on high,
Return'd King Eric's courtesy,
With grace so courteous, and so kind,
It quite deranged the hero's mind.
He kiss'd his brown and brawny fist,
And laid it on his ample breast;
Then grinn'd with most afflicting leer,
And from his visage wiped the tear!
His nobles blush'd, and fretted sore,
And so did Eric, when 'twas o'er.

His face was like a winter day
Aping the summer's glancing ray,
With sunbeam low, and rainbow high,
Arching a frigid boreal sky,
Shaded with cloud so darkly bleak,
Like pall upon creation's cheek,
Rather than summer's youthful hue,
And cloudlets weeping balmy dew.

A herald then, with verge and sword,
And many a pompous, swelling word,
Approach'd King Eric, and, at large,
Deliver'd o'er the sacred charge,—
A charge, in value and esteem,
Ne'er trusted to a king but him.
Eric, with nodding burgonet,
Return'd an answer most discreet,
With sacred promise to neglect
No kind of homage or respect.
Wene curtsey'd with commanding air
And motion'd him behind her chair.

The king look'd up, the king look'd down,
Uncertain if to laugh or frown;
But when he saw the flimsy fair
Moving like angel through the air,
With such a glittering gaudy show
Of flounce, and frill, and furbelow,
His eyes descended from the jilt
Slowly upon his weapon's hilt,
And something that he mutter'd there
Made all his warriors stern to stare.

When Haco met the elfin's eye,
Her little heart ne'er beat so high:
Full well she noted, as she pass'd,
His eager glances upward cast,
And, turning by her snowy veil,
With such a glance, and such a smile,
And such a transport of delight—
Prince Haco's heart was ravish'd quite!

Straight to King Eric's royal tent
Wene and her retinue were sent,

And strict commands were left therein,
To Frotho, the old chamberlain,
That Albyn's queen and suite should have
Whate'er their utmost thoughts could crave:
To that the king had bound him fast,
And he would keep it to the last.

Alas! in vain the high behest!
He little wist what vixen guest
Under his guardship he had ta'en,
But found it nothing to his gain.
Ere half an hour had overpast,
Frotho had applications vast
For things so rare and unforeseen,
He cursed his chance, the truce, the queen.
At first the old man did not miss
To bustle round, and answer "yes;"
But, ere the fall of night, he stood
More like a chamberlain of wood,
Than living thing of flesh and blood;
His senses utterly confounded,
With pages and with maids surrounded,

Calling for this, for that, for more
Than the old man, with all his lore,
Had e'er heard specified before.

Three times, in uttermost despair,
To Eric's presence did he fare,
With face that told how hard his lot,
And eyes that spoke what tongue could not,
Begging his master, on his knee,
Of that dire charge his slave to free.
But the fourth time he came outright;
And then his straits were at the height!
The king on homelier couch was laid,
For sake of this illustrious maid;
And, when aroused from deep repose,
Full high his pride and choler rose:—
"Frotho, begone! By heaven's light,
I'll hear no more of queens to-night!"—

"O king, my message I must tell:
I've served thee long, and served thee well;

But such a task as I have had
For one day more will put me mad.
My heathbell beer, and cider good,—
And two such browsts were never brew'd,—
They've pour'd all forth; and now they whine,
And yawn, and weep, and cry for wine.
My fish they say is food for hogs;
My hams they cast unto the dogs;
And seem united in one plot,
Of calling for what I have not.
And now, to crown these insults high,
The queen desires respectfully,
Her royal ally straight to send
Orders their treatment to amend;
And that 'tis meet her maids and she
Have night apartments separately,
Yet all conjoin'd, for their repose.
What's to be done, great Odin knows!

" She says your tent's not meet for men,
Nor better than a lion's den;
And high-born dames can't make them lairs
On hides of badgers and of bears:

And, therefore, she entreats you, grant
Them chambers, which they greatly want.
For sake of Heaven, my master kind,
Return that pestilence Queen Hynde."—

"'Tis what she wants," King Eric said—
"A plot amongst her nobles laid,
To win their sacred pledge again:
Such stratagems are my disdain!
No crime to me shall one impute—
I'll keep her, and my word to boot;
And if I fail, all men shall see
From fault of mine it shall not be.
I'll keep her till the time be run,
And the last combat lost or won;
Else she is more to reason blind
Than all the rest of womankind."—

"Reason, my liege! God bless the word!
She's free of that as of a sword."—

King Eric rose in growling mood,
And, hurrying on his cloak and hood,

Went forth at midnight gallantly,
Beds for these maidens to supply.
A fair arrangement soon was made;
Queen Wene in Haco's tent was laid—
The very spot on earth where she
Wish'd that her residence might be:
Her sprightly lover and his train
Her guards, all rudeness to restrain.
O ne'er was maid so blest as Wene!

To tell the wiles of loving pairs,
And all the coquetry and airs
Of blooming maids, I do not deign—
Such theme is no delight of mine;
But Haco was in love sincere,
As most of youthful warriors are;
And Wene held hers of higher worth
Than e'er did maiden of the north.

Sooth, they for one another's sake
Were kept for days and nights awake;
And there were fretting, toying, whining,
Jealousies, and inward pining,

Fears what others might discover,—
All the joys that bless the lover!

Nor can I half the projects sing,
Which Wene contrived to plague the king;
So much she drove him from his wit,
No suit from her he would admit;
He spent his days 'mid thousands round,
His nights where he could not be found;
And thus the lovers had their leisure
For grief, for strife, for pain, or pleasure.
But darker paths are to be trod,
For darker doings are abroad;
And secrets strange are on the wing,
Which you must list, and I must sing.

King Eric sat conceal'd, and free
Of woman's importunity,
And to the nobles of his land
Pass'd round the cup with ready hand;
When, lo! the captain of the ward
Brought in a stranger under guard!—

" My liege, here is a churlish wight,
Who craves admission to your sight;
But neither will his name disclose,
Nor whether of our friends or foes;
But so important is his suit,
He will no other tongue depute."—

" Ay, captain; doubtless one of those,
Who, thrusting his officious nose
Into the affairs of other men,
Presumes their notice to obtain.—
Speak out, intruder—say at once
Thy name, thy business, and from whence?
If thou'rt a cotquean, by my soul,
I'll split thy pruriginious noul!"—

" My name, or business, few shall hear;
They're for King Eric's private ear.
If thou art he, I deem it fit
That these gruff carles, who round thee sit,
Should be dismiss'd; for I have theme
Of which you could not even dream—

It is so base. Perhaps I'll sue
For matters touching maidens too:
That's as I choose; but must request
Your private ear, if so you list."—

"It is not difficult to guess,
From thy presuming sauciness,
From whom thou comest; but perchance
Thy errand thou shalt miss for once.
Drag forth the knave without the line;
This is no business hour of mine."—

The captain seized the plaided breast
Of this austere and stubborn guest;
But better had his hand withheld—
The stranger's haughty blood rebell'd:
He aim'd a blow so fierce and full
On that rude captain's burly skull,
That down he dropp'd with growlings deep,
Mumbling out oaths as in a sleep.—

"Curse on thy petulance and thee!"
The stranger cried indignantly.

" I stand unarm'd, as knight should do,
Who comes before a king to bow,
Else I had given thee, for thy meed,
That which should have laid low thy head,
In peace from insult or affray,
Until the final judgment-day.
Here do I stand in Eric's sight,
A messenger in my own right,
Who tidings bring you to your cost;
Refuse them, and your army's lost;
While you shall stand as stocks or poles,
A horde of brainless jobbernoles,
A byword ever to remain.—
Dismiss me at your peril and pain."—
King Eric stood, amazed to see
The stranger's bold effrontery,
And to a chamber led the way,
To listen what such guest would say.

The stranger doff'd his deep disguise,
And shew'd to Eric's wondering eyes
A chief he formerly had known,
A traitor to the Scottish throne,

With whom he secret league had framed.
That chief in song must not be named!
Such shame it is to move a hand,
Or utter word, or lift a brand,
Against our sacred native land.
Such cursed laurels, and such fame,
Shall blur the face of Heaven with shame.—

"I come to thee, my sovereign lord,
According to my pledged word,"
The traitor said. "In enmity
I fought against thy sway and thee;
My life by thee was saved, and all
My people from Norwegian thrall:
I will requite it, if I may.
Eric, with all thy proud array,
With all thy might, and valour wild,
Thou art as simple as a child.
Thou think'st thou hast within thy tent
A pledge the most magnificent;
The jewel of all earthly things,
The daughter of an hundred kings!

Eric, (to Albyn's shame be't said,)
Thou nothing hast but waiting-maid;
And some few giglets of the court,
Sent forth of thee to make their sport.

"The queen is fled, with her the crown,
And all the riches of the town;
Each thing of value is defaced,
Or safely in Dunstaffnage placed;
The guards are set at ford and pier,
And now at thee they laugh and jeer.
The queen by night was borne away—
I bore a hand across the bay,
And view'd the works—the huge fascines,
The fosse, the bridge, the martial lines;
And must confess, ere them you win,
You'll buy all dear that is within."—

King Eric's rage was too severe
His indignation to declare
In human speech. He look'd around,
And smiled, with eyes cast on the ground;

But when again those eyes were raised,
A flame unearthly in them blazed,
Which, from a face of generous light,
Had something dreadful to the sight.
It was as if the lightning's gleam
Had mingled with the noonday beam—
As ray of heaven and flash of hell
Together upon mortals fell.

No word the king had yet express'd,
When other message on him press'd:
Odin's high priest it was who came,
With bloody hands and bloated frame—
A man who Eric more enchain'd
Than he the serfs o'er whom he reign'd.
And thus he spoke:—"O mighty king,
Some dire events are gathering
Around our heads. The heavenly host
Is wroth, and Norway's army's lost,
Unless these tyrants of the skies
Are straight appeased by sacrifice.

" I've sacrificed on Odin's shrine,
And Thor's, and Freya's, nine times nine
Of living creatures, one and all,
On which they feast in Odin's hall;
But all my omens are of death,
And all my answers given in wrath.
Now, mighty king, there's but one meed;
A human sacrifice must bleed.
A solemn offering there must be
Of stainless virgins three times three;
Though all the bounds of Caledon
In search of them should be outgone,
They must be had, whate'er the cost—
Else thou, and I, and all, are lost.
If these are found, in beauty's prime,
And to Valhalla sent in time,
To join the galliardise and noise,
And reap Valhalla's boisterous joys—
I pledge my word, and faith in Heaven,
Ample success shall yet be given
Unto your arms. But, sure as thou
And I are living creatures now,

That rite neglected, all is done,
And mighty Eric's race is run."—

" Sire, I attend thy hest sublime—
Thou ne'er could'st come in better time:
I now have under my control
Twelve virgins, pure of frame and soul;
And thou as freely them shalt have
As e'er thou hadst a worthless slave.
Without the light of Odin's eye,
We're less than nought and vanity;
Then take them all, without debate,
And on thy altars immolate.—
Captain, attend my strict behest:
Go forth with Odin's ancient priest,
And guard the altar of the Sun,
Until this great oblation's done;
And whosoever dares control
This high command, or fret, or growl,
Straight cut him off, whate'er he be,
Regardless of his high degree."—

The priest let fall his ghastful jaw,
When Eric's ireful looks he saw.
He deem'd the order given in jest,
If not in mockery of a priest.
To immolate a sovereign dame,
And hostage maidens without blame,
Was act so ruthless and severe,
As Scania's annals did not bear.
But when he heard the closing threat,
His bloodshot eye became elate;
And through his soul of dark alloy
There darted stern and bloody joy.

As when, in ages long agone,
The sons of God before the throne
Of their Almighty Father came,
To pay their vows, and name his name;
And there came one, the rest among,
In hopes that, in the glorious throng,
A skulking vagabond and spy
Might 'scape his lord's omniscient eye;—
Think how that felon would appear
When these dread words fell on his ear,

"WHENCE COMEST THOU?"—Sure then that eye,
That once had beam'd in heaven high,
Would be upraised, in terror, fierce,
Towards the Lord of the universe!
If that great God had added then,
"Go, seize that righteous, best of men,
My servant Job, with all his kin,
And close them up thy den within
For evermore,"—think of the air,
The savage joy, the dark despair,
That would have mingled in the mien
Of face that once had angel's been!
And think, too, of this look below—
This look from type of mankind's foe!
I love to draw a scene to thee
Where misconstruction cannot be,
And spread it to thy spirit's view,
In hopes the mental glass is true.

Eric went forth without delay;
The war-note rang from brake and brae,
And Norway's warriors rush'd with joy
To reave, to ravish, and destroy.

The priest of Odin likewise went
Up to Prince Haco's gaudy tent,
And laid the splendid Wene in thrall,
With her attendant maidens all.
Their feet with silken bands they tied,
Their lily hands down by each side;
Then bathed their bodies in the milk,
And robed them in the damask silk;
While every flower of lovely bloom,
And all that shed the sweet perfume,
In wreaths and fillets richly bound,
Bedeck'd their heads and bodies round.
The red rose of Damascus shed
Down from the brow the tints of red,
O'er faces late in beauty's glow,
But now as pale as winter snow.

They were, in sooth, a lovely sight,
Stretch'd side by side in bridal white;
Their lips praying to be forgiven;
Their streaming eyes turn'd towards heaven;
While Odin's priest and suffragan
The consecration-work began.

The bloated heathen cast his eyes
On that benignant sacrifice,
And, lifting up his hands on high,
The briny tear dropp'd from his eye:
It was not for the grievous doom
Of beauty blasted in the bloom,
But at the triumph and delight
Would be in Odin's halls that night.
He thought how his great god would laugh,
And how his warrior ghosts would quaff
Their skull-cups, fill'd unto the brim,
In long and generous healths to him
Who sent them such a lovely store
As warrior ghosts ne'er saw before;
And then he thought, how welcome he
In high Valhalla's dome would be.

Great God! 'tis thou alone can'st scan
Thy lingering, longing creature—man;
Who, from the time that reason's ray
Beams from his eye on nature's sway,
Still onward must insatiate press
To unknown state of blissfulness.

One summit gain'd, how many more !
Before ! before ! 'tis still before,
But must be reach'd ; till, grasping far
Beyond the range of sun and star,
He rears himself a heavenly home,
In glory's everlasting dome.

Still must that state, to be believed,
Be something dark and unconceived ;
And, distant far, involved must be
In shadows of futurity :—
Our Caledonian sires of yore
Look'd upward to their mountains hoar,
As to the place they loved the best
For home of everlasting rest ;
And there, within his shroud of mist,
The rude, romantic sciolist,
Hoped with the souls of friends to meet,
And roam in conversation sweet ;
Or on his downy bark to sail,
High o'er the billows of the gale.
The Scandinavian look'd before
For wine and wassail, ramp and roar ;

For virgins radiant as the sun,
And triumphs ever, ever won;
For revels on the fields above,
And maddening joys which warriors love.
But now, where rests the morbid eye
Of sceptical philosophy?
On the cold grave; and only this—
Worms, dust, and final nothingness!
Great God! within this world of thine,
Is there a human soul divine
That hopes no farther bliss to scan!
How dark the question, "What is man?"—
What he hath been, the world can see;
Thou only know'st what he shall be!

While this ecstatic rite went on,
The battle raged in Beregon.
With Eric's host the day went hard,
Which caused the holy altar's guard
To be withdrawn. A virgin's prayer
No passing gale can waft in air

From its high aim. The gods are kind,
And lovers' eyes are ill to blind.

Prince Haco, from the battle-field,
The stir within the camp beheld,—
For still his eyes unconscious moved
Toward the treasure which he loved,—
And sore he fear'd mischance might fall
To Albyn's queen and maidens all.
He sent a friend, whose truth he knew,
That scene of bustle to review,
And bring him word. Short then the space
Ere Haco vanish'd from his place,
And more with him, for there was need
Of ardent lover's utmost speed.

Wene in life's bustle took delight,
Whether in frolic or despite;
And even this splendid sacrifice
Held some enchantment to her eyes;
The robes, the flowers, the proud display,
The pallid forms that round her lay,

Whom Wene from year to year had known
To frolic prone, and that alone;
Though sore beset, she felt delight,
Some sly enjoyment, at their plight;
For still she deem'd that honour's law
So dire a warrant would withdraw.

But when the priests their hymns had sung,
And their white robes aside had flung;
When from long words they came to deeds,
Had laid their hands on victims' heads,
And sacred fire deposed the while,
To set on flame that lofty pile,
Good sooth, but Wene thought it was time
For her best wits to be in prime;
And straight she brought them to the test—
They ne'er could be in more request.

Soon as the rapt and ruthless priest
Had strew'd the death-dew on her breast,
(An ointment rich in heavenly worth,
And fragrance of the flowery north!)

And said the words that they were all
To say on entering Odin's hall;
Wene thus, with sharp and cutting speech,
Presumed the pedagogues to teach:—

"List me, thou priest of Scania's land,
And dolts that drudge at his command;
If you dare Christian maidens send
To Odin's hall, 'tis at an end—
Valhalla falls! And, take my word,
His godship of the shield and sword
From heaven descends with all his crew,
Driven headlong from yon vales of blue;
A banish'd, branded, broken corps,
Doom'd to disturb the heavens no more.

"A sacred sovereign, you'll allow,
Should better know these things than you;
For God's vicegerent must have wit
What the Supreme approves as fit;
And this is truth. If you would please
Great Odin, and his wrath appease,

Preserve us lovely, living things,
An offering to your King of Kings.
For, should you dare suppose that he
A god so brutalized could be,
As in dead virgin to delight
More than in living beauty bright,
You shall stand beacons of his scorn,
And rue the time that you were born !

" But what is more ; though Eric now,
In anger, hath consign'd to you
Me and my maidens, to disgrace
The faith of Odin's kingly race ;
On this rely ; his ire and hate
Will turn on you when 'tis too late ;
For on his name you fix a stain
That ne'er can be wash'd out again.
Think of a sovereign's sacred blood ;
And for a word in churlish mood
Dare not to break through law divine,
And bring a curse on all your line ;
That curse that rends from Heaven's grace,
Pronounced by all the human race."—

At the first part of Wene's address
The priesthood smiled in scornfulness,
But the last part appear'd too true,
Even to their own distorted view.
They paused, and whisper'd round the pile,
Keeping the flame subdued the while.
The virgins cried aloud to God
To look down from his blest abode,
And for his sake, who took the scorn
Of earthly virgin to be born,
Regard their peril and their grief,
And in his mercy send relief.
The priest of Odin was distress'd,
But to proceed he judged it best;
Though reason shew'd the thing unjust,
These Christian prayers were ne'er to trust.

The flame unto the pile was set,
But seem'd to mount in slow regret;
Reluctantly, from spray to spray,
It crackled, hiss'd, and crept away.
The smoke arose in writhing pain,
Then bent its course to earth again,

As if affrighten'd to bedim
The snowy robe and tender limb;
A throe of hesitation dumb
Seem'd struggling not to be o'ercome.

Bless'd be the power of maiden's tongue!
Aye, in the lovely and the young,
Supreme; and blest the shrewd surmise
That marr'd this odious sacrifice!
Before the prayer of rueful Wene
Had half-way reach'd the last *Amen;*
Before the blaze had half-way won
Around the altar of the Sun,
The gods, or men, contrived so well
(For which the priests could never tell)
To send relief, that at one bound
It seem'd to spring out of the ground.
A rapid rush of clansmen true,
In tartans dark, and bonnets blue,
Sprung on the pile as on a prey,
And bore the sacrifice away.
The priests were hurtled to a side,
And with the fetters firmly tied;

Then up the flame rose to the sky,
Without a human groan or cry;
While Odin's servants lay amazed,
And on the bloodless offering gazed.

Within the tents, or them behind,
Swift as an image of the mind,
The clansmen vanish'd from the scene,
As quickly as their rise had been;
Each bearing virgin on his arm,
Panting with joy and wild alarm,
Their forms bedeck'd with many a wreath,
And all the bridal robes of death.

The men were arm'd with sword and shield;
And, as the priests lay on the field,
Full sore they wonder'd how they fared
So well; and why their lives were spared;
And how it happ'd their enemies
Had not made them the sacrifice.
But there they lay, safe and alone,
And the mysterious troop was gone

Without a word of threat or dare;
They could not tell from whence they were!
If by the sea or air they went,
Or if by man or angel sent!
But this most shrewd conjecture rose,
On priest's conception comatose,
That these gods of the Christian crew
Somewhat of earthly matters knew.

But all this while, from side to side,
The battle roll'd like swelling tide;
Now southward, bearing all before,
Now north, with eddy and with roar.
It raged in every lane and street,
And space where foemen chanced to meet.
There was no foot of hallow'd ground,
The regal Beregonium round,
That, ere the setting of the sun,
Was, inch by inch, not lost and won.

The men of Moray, cautious still,
Kept by the rampart of the hill,

And hurl'd their javelins afar,
Sore galling the Norwegian war;
But the fierce clansmen of the north,
And western tribes, of equal worth,
Rush'd to the fight withouten awe
Whene'er a foeman's face they saw,
And grievous was the slaughter then,
Among the bravest Scottish men.

O what a waste of mortal life!
And what a stern and stormy strife
Prevail'd around, as far it spread,
Reeling, as warriors fought or fled!
Not then, as now, met mortal foes
In phalanx firm, to wheel, and close,
Trying to win by warrior sleight,
Manœuvring by the left or right—
In those rude days they closed amain,
Fought shield to shield upon the plain;
And the more hot the battle glow'd,
The farther was it shed abroad;
Till every warrior, as might be,
Fought one with one, with two, or three;

And one resistless hero's hand
Oft bore the honours from a land.

So was it there; the battle's roar
Spread all along the level shore;
The city lanes were too confined,
Men had not scope unto their mind;
And forth they issued, west around
The citadel, on level ground;
And there, in motley mortal coil,
Went on the battle's bloody toil.

Gods, how King Eric's sovereign wrath
Peopled the ghostly vales of death!
Where'er his rapid course he turn'd,
With deadlier heat the combat burn'd;
Forward, around, where Eric came,
There roar'd the vortex of the flame.
'Twas like the whirlwind's rolling ire
Careering through a field of fire,
Rending and tossing, as in play,
The thundering element away.

There was a chief of Albyn's land,
Of proud renown, hight Coulan Brande,
Who held his sway by forest stern,
And many a mountain dark and dern,
From where the Lwin meets the tide,
To proud Ben-Airley's shaggy side;
That land of red-deer and of roe,
Possess'd by the great Gordon now.

That chief had borne his honours far,
Amid the waning southern war;
And his red balachs * of the hill
The foremost in the broil were still.
Ill brook'd he the degrading sight
Of that deray, by Eric's might;
The vortex came like rolling tide;
Brande call'd his followers to his side,
And bade them open and give ground
Till Eric pass'd, then wheel around,
And close upon his giant train,
Their ruthless ravage to restrain.—

* *Balachs*—Rude peasantry, boors.

" Press on them hard; retreat be none;
Be work like that of warriors done.
Let me behold no broad claymore
That is not stain'd with foeman's gore;
Let me behold no buckler's face
That is not clour'd with sword or mace;
And could you sever from his train
That Hector of the northern main,
Then, by my Ciothar's lofty crest,
That props the heaven's own holy breast,
And by that heaven's uplifted dome,
The warrior's everlasting home,
This sword shall make that hero's brow
Stoop lowlier than his footstep now!"—

Alongst the field King Eric flew,
The boldest from his brand withdrew;
Red desolation mark'd his track;
For his fierce veterans, at his back,
On either side were hard bestead,
Where gallant foemen fought and bled,
Along the midst of Coulan's train.
O dreadful grew the conflict then!

For the red balachs of the fell,
With shout, with clangour, and with yell,
Rush'd on the Norse from either hill,
And sore, with broadsword and with bill,
Gall'd the array of that fierce train,
Who, back to back, could scarce sustain,
Upon their long outlengthen'd line,
The claymore and the brigantine;
For every man that Coulan led,
Had his broad breast with bull's-hide clad.

But Eric, reckless oft of life,
Press'd forward in the bloody strife,
Till so it happ'd, his train outgone,
There was he left to fight alone.
Coulan perceived, with throbbing breast,
The chance had come for which he wish'd;
Longer the strife he could not shun,
Something illustrious must be done;
Either his life he must lay down,
Or raise his name to great renown;
Then, rousing all his energies
To this momentous enterprize,

Shaking his javelin and claymore,
He took his stand the king before.—

" Oppressor of a guiltless land !
Presumptuous spoiler ! stay thy hand,"
He cried, " and hear the truth severe,
That shall not quail for monarch's ear.
Say, is thy soul not darker now
Than e'er was Ethiop's sable brow,
Distain'd with every human crime,
That blotted has the rolls of time ?
Detested persecutor ! who
But thee would manhood's claim forego
By raising war and breaking sooth
With beauty, innocence, and youth ?
And, if no lies are on the wind,
With sacrifice of dreadful kind ?
Thou monster ! loathed be thy name
By all that bear the human frame !
Thy race is run, thy hour at hand,
God speed the shaft of Coulan Brande !"—

With that his brazen javelin true,
With all his mountain might he threw,
And steady aim that might to tell,
But short the winged weapon fell;
For to his left wrist it was tied
With plaited thong of badger's hide;
And swifter than a mind can frame,
Unpractised in that warlike game,
He haul'd it back, and threw, and threw
With force increased, as nigh he drew.

Eric was gall'd, his ire arose,
For faster, fiercer, came the blows,
Without impediment or let,
From that aerial dragonet.
It pierced his gorget and his gear,
Stunning his brow and sovereign ear;
Yet farther durst he not advance,
But check'd his own precipitance;
For all his valour and his rage
Were temper'd by reflection sage.
He foam'd with ire, and plunged amain,
Like restiff steed that scorns the rein,

But saw, if once his men he left,
An hundred balachs, stern and deft,
Watching, with keen and eager eye,
Unto their leader's aid to fly;
And with a smile of fierce disdain,
He drew back to his lines again.

Loud shouted Brande's obstreperous horde,
Lauding their brave and matchless lord,
Who, in the splendour of his might,
In single combat had outright
Put the great northern king to flight!

What vengeance Eric pour'd around,
Where'er a combatant he found
That dared the strife! and many a brave
And gallant knight found timeless grave.
Oft did his glance embrace the strand
In search of haughty Coulan Brande;
Who on his name had cast a stain
That would not well wash out again;—
Alas! he knew not, nor could see
How much more deep that stain would be!

Brande of his fortune was so proud,
The very ground on which he stood
He seem'd to spurn, as o'er the war
His eye roll'd loftily afar.
This Donald Bane, his neighbour sly,
Beheld, and strode up hastily,
And said these words, for clansmen near
Each other's pride could never bear :—

" O, gallant Brande, make haste, advance ;
For none, save thee, with sword or lance
Can check yon scourge of Scotia's host ;
Advance, or Albyn's banner's lost !
Gillespick's down ; Clan-Gillan's bróke ;
Lochourn leans o'er his tarnish'd oak ;
My brother Allan keeps aloof,
Trustless of arm, and armour's proof ;
The field's laid waste !—O, Brande, there's none
Can turn that tide but thou alone."—

" Reptiles !" cried Brande, and forth he flew,
Curling his lip, and eke his brow,

Straight onward, Eric to amate;
Yet there was something in his gait
That shew'd reluctance to the way;
A hurry, mingled with delay,
Perhaps an omen ill defined,
A darksome boding of the mind.

As ever you saw a fiery steed
Eying the path with wistful dread,
And eyes with gleams of fury glancing,
Wheeling, snorting, rearing, prancing;
Till, lash'd amain, away he breaks,
The steep ascent with fury takes,
And, panting, foaming, flounders on,
Until, his strength and spirits gone,
Straining to do more than he can,
Down rush the chariot, horse, and man.

So was it now with Coulan Brande,
The Lord of Lwin's forest land,
The hunter proud of Garnachoy,
Of Laggan, Lurich, and Glen-Roy;

Goaded along, he cross'd the field,
Uprear'd his sword, advanced his shield,
And straight in front of Eric ran,
And thus address'd the godlike man:—

"Traitor, methought that I had once
Given thee to know thy puissance
Not matchless was. Why wilt thou then
Come fuming 'mid ignoble men,
Staining thy brand with boorish blood?
Tyrant, this braggart lustihood
Becomes thee not. Desist, for shame!
Here stands thy conqueror, thee to tame."—

Eric laugh'd loud; both cliff and shaw
Made answer to his keen ha, ha!
No more he said, but sword in hand
He ruthless rush'd on Coulan Brande;
Furious upon the chief he came,
Trowing his mountain might to tame
At the first blow; but tale he lost,
And reckon'd once without his host.

Brande his broad buckler managed so,
That Eric's furious rush and blow
Were borne aside with science yare,
And Eric spent his force in air,
So freely spent, that, on the strand,
Forward he stumbled o'er his brand;
And, since his restless life began,
Such perilous risk it never ran.

Brande was too brave of soul and mind
To strike a prostrate foe behind;
Else doubt is none, that, in that strife,
Low at his steps lay Eric's life;
And kinsmen ever blamed the hand
That nail'd him not to Scotia's strand.

Eric arose, his cheek was flush'd,
With shame the mighty monarch blush'd,
In such an onset thus to be
Outdone, and more in courtesy.
The pangs he felt were so severe,
They were too much for him to bear;

And wish from these his heart to free,
Had nearly brought him to his knee;
But pride of rank, and pride of name,
His brilliant and untarnish'd fame;
Muster'd around without control,
And whisper'd vengeance to his soul.
He rose and turn'd upon his foe;
Brande all undaunted met the blow;
And in the combat that ensued,
Shew'd equal might and fortitude.

The king rush'd in, with guard and clasp,
And, trusting to his powerful grasp,
From which no single force could free,
He closed with Brande impetuously;
And seizing on his gorget fast,
With wrench that giant force surpass'd,
He snapp'd the clasps of burnish'd steel,
And casque and cuirass, to his heel,
Came off with jangle and with clang,
And on the level roll'd and rang.

Brande turn'd to fly, for, in a word,
His buckler, too, if not his sword,
Had in that struggle fall'n or broke;
He turn'd to fly; but, at a stroke,
Eric, while at his utmost speed,
Sheer from his body hew'd his head.
Far roll'd the bloody pate away;
The body ran, without a stay,
A furlong in that guise uncouth;
So said the Norse, and swore it truth!

The shouts of subjects from each side,
Aroused the hero's warrior pride—
A moment roused it; but anon
On his brown cheek the tear-drop shone,
And throbs, that in his bosom's cell
Heaved like an earthquake, told too well
How sore he rued the ruthless blow
Inflicted on so brave a foe,
To whose high generous soul he owed
A life most haplessly bestow'd;

And, as if from a dream awoke,
These words he rather groan'd than spoke:
"Ah! how this laurel galls my brow!
Eric ne'er vanquish'd was till now."—

The battle now had spread away
Round all the friths of Keila bay—
Parties with adverse parties meeting,
And both sides losing and defeating.
Where chief 'gainst adverse chief prevail d,
There partial success never fail'd;
And braver feats were never done
Than were that day round Beregon;
Nor more illustrious were the slain—
No, not on Ilium's classic plain.

The chiefs that most distinguish'd shone
In that dire day's confusion,
Were Allan Bane, who, 'mid the war,
O'erthrew the giant Osnagar,
Despite the monster's might in weir,
And execrations dread to hear:

Roaring, and cursing his decay,
He foam'd his savage soul away.

And the brave Lord of Sutherland,
Of dauntless heart, and steady hand,
Never, in all that bloody coil,
Engaged with foe he did not foil:
A Finnish prince, and Danish lord,
Both sunk beneath his heavy sword;
And all their buskin'd followers fierce,
Dismay'd at such a stern reverse,
Before the men of Navern dale,
Fled like the chaff before the gale.

Intrepid Gaul, the Lord of Tain,
And Ross's wild and wide domain,
Bore on with unresisted sway.
He seem'd some demon of dismay,
That through the ranks of Scania's war
Bore desolation fierce and far;
His hideous face was grisly grim,
His form distorted every limb;

Yet his robust and nervous arm
Laid warriors low as by a charm—
For that rude form contain'd a mind
Above the rest of human kind.

Distress'd by Brande's unworthy fate,
Eric drew off ere it was late,
Scowling and sobbing by the way,
Like warrior that had lost the day;
And oft repeating, as before,
These words, that grieved his captains sore:
" Eric is conquer'd at the last!
His day of victory is o'erpast!
A conquest ne'er to be believed,
Reversed, remitted, nor retrieved!"—

The gathering trumpets' lordly sound
Gather'd his scatter'd bands around,
And from a fiercer, bloodier fray,
That note ne'er call'd his troops away;
For, though the 'vantage they had won,
Never was Eric so outdone.

The pride of Albyn's mountain strand,
The great emporium of the land,
The royal city now was lost,
And occupied by Eric's host.
The seven towers of Selma too,
Alas! were all abandon'd now!
That for a thousand years had stood,
Circled by mountain, cliff, and flood,
And ne'er had oped at foe's behest,
Except to captive or to guest.

For why, this landing unawares
Placed Hynde amid a thousand snares;
Her throne, her city, and her state,
Beleaguer'd by a force so great,
That the least turn of fortune might
Place all at Eric's steps outright.
Her nobles, this to countervail,
Bore her away by oar and sail
In dead of night, and not alone;
Her court, her treasures, and her throne,
Safe in Dunstaffnage did they place,
Where they had vantage-ground and space

To place their guards by ford and mere,
That none should come their treasure near.

Their queen thus safe, it was not strange
That they, with coolness and revenge,
Fought out the field, from early noon
Until the rising of the moon;
And then drew off, from pursuit free,
In still and sullen enmity.

Though conscious that a fraud full low
They practised had upon the foe,
They knew not yet on what pretence
Eric had dared this bold offence,
Breaking his faith without regard,
And rushing on them unprepared.
Their loss was great, without defeat;
Yet still their queen and coronet,
And sacred choir, they, all the three,
Had placed in full security;
Hence they resolved to suffer dumb
The good, or ill, as each should come.

Outposts and watchers not a few
They placed around in order due,
And straight prepared, with rueful speed,
To pay due honours to the dead.
At dawn a messenger was sent,
With all dispatch, to Eric's tent;
To ask of him one peaceful day,
Due honours to their slain to pay.

The king at first declined discourse;
O'erwhelm'd with sorrow and remorse,
He sat alone, and neither foe
Nor friend durst nigh his presence go.
His ruthless and ungenerous deed
Gnaw'd his great soul without remede;
And the brave youth he loved the most,
Prince Haco, was in battle lost,
With all the chief men of his train,
And were not found among the slain.
If these were captives, what avail
Had fall'n into his enemy's scale!
If they deserted had the land,
The sceptre wriggled in his hand.

But, worst of all, the sacrifice
By which he trusted from the skies
Support to win, the gods' command
Seem'd to have reft from his right hand.
And now his priests, in deep despair,
Foreboded nought but dole and care.

Eric sat wondering all alone
Into what land these maids had gone—
If some intrepid chief's array
Had come and stolen his pledge away,
Or Odin had upborne them all
Alive into Valhalla's hall.
At all events, that hope was cross'd,
The mighty sacrifice was lost,
And Eric was assured too well
Of more mishap than tongue could tell;
In such a toilsome mood he flounced
When Albyn's herald was announced.
And this was all the answer brief
He deign'd unto the Scottish chief:—

" Go, tell him to speed home apace :
With son of that deceitful race
No speech I hold—no, not a word,
Save o'er the gauntlet or the sword."—

" Sire, he is sent express, to say
The Scots request one peaceful day,
To bury those in battle slain,
Which, if refused, they come again
Over their carcasses to fight,
And God in Heaven support the right !
For that dear privilege they'll stand,
While living man is in the land."—

" The Scots' request is bold and high,"
King Eric said with kindling eye ;
" And straight I grant it, with demand
That, at the bier of Coulan Brande,
I as chief mourner may appear ;
Then all the obsequies, so dear
To kindred souls, shall mingled be,
Without offence or frown from me.

In feast, and sport, we all combine;
No answer—let the charge be mine."—

Next morn, by mutual consent,
The arms of either host were pent
In heaps within each camp, and all
Flock'd to the mingled festival.
At Coulan's bier King Eric took
Chief place, with attitude and look
That struck both friend and foeman's eye
As fraught with dread solemnity.
High on the hill of Kiel were laid
The ashes of the mighty dead,
Hence call'd, with all its cairns so grey,
" Hill of the Slain," until this day.
There, over Coulan's lowly urn,
The mighty Eric deign'd to mourn;
Bow'd his imperial head full low,
Wiped his red eye and burning brow,
And thus address'd the gaping crowd,
That motley, moving multitude:—

" Soldiers and denizens, give ear ;
I say the words that all may hear :
Here, o'er the dust of chief, I bow,
That conquer'd him who speaks to you ;
He owns it. Eric of the north,
Who ne'er before acknowledged worth
Superior to his own, avows
That Coulan Brande has shorn his brows
Of all the honours there that grew,
So lone, untarnish'd, bright, and new.

" This chief, in battle's deadliest hour,
A forfeit life held in his power ;
That life was mine ; it lay full low
Beneath his lifted, threaten'd blow :
But, scorning vantage and reward,
High honour only his regard,
His hand withheld the blow intended.
Would to the gods it had descended !
And cleft this heart, whose festering core
Feels pangs it never felt before !

" Fortune gave me such chance again.
Where was thine honour, Eric, then?
In heat of ire I struck the blow
That laid this injured hero low;
But that this stroke I did not stay
I'll rue until my dying day,
And to the world this truth proclaim—
Eric, with all his martial fame,
For once acknowledges compeer;
Vanquish'd in that he held most dear,
He shrouds the palm can ne'er return
Within this low and sacred urn.

" Warriors from shores of either main,
In honour of this hero slain,
Contend in every manly game,
To be memorial of his name,
And theirs, upon that fatal field,
Who rather chose to die than yield.
Prizes, I grant, of warrior store,
Such as were never given before.

" As is the wont, in Albyn's land,
For the chief hero's shield and brand,
The trial first, of skill, must be,
Who throws the dart as well as he ;
For in that art he could outdo
All men that ever javelin threw.
Hie to the contest ; every throw
Be steady as at breast of foe."—

Each chief, each prince, and petty king,
Prepared the javelin to fling ;
But, of them all, the steadiest hand
And eye, were those of Olaf Brande,
Who bore in triumph from the field
His honour'd brother's sword and shield,
Though it was ween'd, superior skill
Could well have won, but had not will.

The prize that next was heaved in sight
Was golden bracelet burnish'd bright,
To him that in the race should won,
And chief, and hind, and all outrun.

For there no preference was to be
Conferr'd on lineage or degree;
Nor was it needful, in that age,
The low estate of vassalage
Withheld the peasant from the bound
Of high exploit, or deed renown'd.
A being mean of mind and frame,
The creature of a chief supreme;
No heart had he, no towering hope,
With proud Milesian might to cope;
And of these casts, as legends say,
The traits remain until this day.

Eager the golden prize to win,
The light of heart came pouring in—
All noble youths, of agile make,
Who loved the race for running's sake,
And hoped, at least, to mar the way
Of the superiors in the play;
But chiefly, if they saw the Norse,
Would Albyn's youths put to the worse.

No fewer wights than twenty-two,
All rank'd in one continuous row,
Stood stripp'd and belted for the fun,
And panting for the word to run.
The bugle sounded short and low—
A paleness glitter'd on each brow!
The bugle sounded loud and long,
And every chest, with heavings strong,
And mouth, seem'd gasping, breath to gain
More than their circuits could contain.
The bugle's third note was a yell,
A piercing, momentary knell;
O what relief to every heart!
It was the warning note to start.
Then, like a flock of sheep new shorn,
Or startled roes at break of morn,
Away they spring mid whoop and hollo,
And light of foot were those could follow.

For three good furlongs of the space
All was confusion in the race;
For there was jostling, jumping, fretting,
And breasts with elbows rudely meeting.

One luckless youth, who took the van,
Had overstrain'd him as he ran ;
His ardent breast had borne him so
Much faster than his wont to go,
That his untoward limbs declined
To strike as fast as he'd a mind,
Refused the effort with disdain,
And down he stumbled on the plain.
Before one could have utter'd cry,
Or sworn an oath, or closed an eye,
A dozen flagrant youths and more
Were heap'd and tumbling on the shore,
Each muttering terms uncouth to tell,
And cursing aye the last that fell.

Some rose and ran, though far behind ;
Some join'd the laugh, and lay reclined ;
But now the interest grew extreme ;
Feldborg the Dane, like lightning's gleam,
Shot far ahead, and still askance
Backward he threw his comely glance,
Which said full plainly, " I opine,
Most worthy sirs, the prize is mine."—

And still, as straining in the race,
A smile play'd on his courteous face;
For who in courtly form and air,
With Danish Feldborg could compare?

The farthest goal is won and past,
And Feldborg still is gaining fast;
Aloud the joyous clamour grew
From Eric's grim and boisterous crew,
While one small voice alone could cry
From Albyn's host, "Fie, kinsmen, fie!"
Eon of Elry heard that word
Call'd by a loved and honour'd lord,
And straight the bold athletic bard
Was after Feldborg straining hard,
Skimming the sandy level plain
With swiftness man could not sustain.

Feldborg of Denmark, now the time
To weave thy name in lofty rhyme!
To rank thee with the seraphim
Depends but on thy strength of limb!

But well thou knew'st, that chief, or king,
Or living creature without wing,
To scale the heaven might try as well,
As run with thee and thee excel;
All this thou knew'st; it was thy boast,
And so did many to their cost.

Eon M'Eon, do not flinch,
For thou art gaining inch by inch;
Strain thy whole frame and soul to boot;
Nay, thou art gaining foot by foot;
The crowd perceives it with acclaim,
And every accent breathes thy name.
Eon of Elry, God thee speed!
One other stretch, and thou'rt ahead.

Feldborg, what's that which thee doth gall?
What does thy look equivocal
Note by thy side glittering so bright?
A bracelet clasp! by Odin's might!
And that proud slieve in verity,
Eon of Elry, forces by.

Strain, Feldborg, strain, or thou shalt lose;
His elbow kythes, and eke his nose!—
Where are they now? In moment gone!
And Feldborg gains the goal alone!
Elry lies prostrate on the plain,
Laughing aloud, in breathless pain,
Spurning the land with fitful scream;
While his bright eye's unearthly gleam,
Bespoke full well how ill content
His heart was with the incident.
With curling lip, and brow of flame,
And cheek that rankled half for shame,
He laughing rose, and wiped his brow,
"By Heaven, sir, I no more could do!"—

The golden gem of potent charm
Glitters on Feldborg's swarthy arm,
While he survey'd the trophy grand,
With countenance as proudly bland,
As every bard in Albyn green
An eulogist to him had been,
And given to him a fulsome lay,
The dearest pledge e'er came his way.

Feldborg, thou hast effected feat,
That stamps thee consummately great;
For thou hast vanquish'd one whose name
Stands highest on the list of fame.
Although an enemy and a Dane,
I hold thy victory immane;
Laud to thy noble visage swart!
Illustrious man of tale and chart!
Professor of the running art!

The game that follow'd next the race
Was pitching of an iron mace,
From buskin'd foot, which made it wheel,
With whirling motion like a reel
Aloft in air—I not pretend
This ancient game to comprehend;
But yet th' expert could pitch it straight,
Like arrow at convenient height,
And lodge it at the farthest goal,
Fix'd in the earth like upright pole.
A Danish game it was; therefore
The Danish chiefs the mastery bore;

As for the Scots, they toil'd in vain ;
Like coursers without curb or rein,
They spent their spirits and their might
In efforts without rule or sleight.

King Eric, grimly smiling, came
As if in sport to share the game ;
He heaved the mace like stager's poy,
And twirl'd it like a lady's toy ;
Then from his buskin's brazen toe,
Like arching meteor made it go ;
Till far beyond the utmost cast,
Deep in the soil it lodged fast.
No clamour rose, as one might trow,
From such a monarch's master-throw ;
But through the host, from man to man,
A buzz of admiration ran,
And no one judged it for his thrift,
The mighty mace again to lift.—

" Come, princes ! captains !" Eric cried,
With voice as though he meant to chide ;

" Come ! To the sport ! It is confest
You're playing with it for a jest.
Pitch all again. I gave that throw
As earnest of what more I'll do."—

Each chief disclaim'd the fruitless deed,
Or hemm'd, and smiled, and shook the head,
And all prepared the prize to yield,
And rush into some other field.
When lo ! a burly peasant proud
Came dashing through the heartless crowd,
Shouldering both chief and vassal by,
As things of no utility ;
Straight to th' avoided mace he broke,
And aye he stutter'd as he spoke ;
Fast from his tongue the threat'nings fell,
Though what they were no man could tell ;
Up from its hold he tore the mace,
And ran unto the footing place ;
But, lo ! his sinewy foot was bare,
Nor sandal, hoe, nor brog was there !
To pitch the iron club from thence,
Surpass'd even savage truculence.

The laugh was loud, while, in his need,
The kerne look'd round for some remede,
And for a bonnet grasp'd his hair,
But a red snood alone was there.
With grasp of power he seized the bent,
A sod from the earth's surface rent;
Which, placing on his foot with care,
The massive club he rested there;
Then his strong limb behind him drew,
And grinn'd and goggled as he threw;
But with such force he made it fly,
It swither'd through the air on high,
Soughing with harsh and heavy ring,
Like sound of angry condor's wing,
Till far beyond King Eric's throw
It delved the earth with awkward blow.—

"Beshrew the knave!" King Eric cried;
His nobles with a curse replied,
And crowded to the spot outright,
To wonder at the peasant's might.
"Who, or what is the savage young?"
Was ask'd by every flippant tongue;

But to make answer there was none,
Nor one could tell where he was gone;
The golden prize on high was rear'd,
But claimant there was none appear'd.—

"It is the giant Lok, I know,
Sent by the gods from hell below,
Against my growing power to plot,
And vanquish might which man could not,"
With look demure, King Eric cried.—
"'Tis Lok!" each Scanian tongue replied.
The victor was not found, nor came
His prize of lofty worth to claim;
And all the Norse believed, and said,
Their king by Lok was vanquished.

The leaping, wrenching, fencing, all
Were won by youths of Diarmid's hall;
While Eric's soldiers took their loss
With manners quarrelsome and cross.
But of the boat-race these made sure;
The gilded barge was theirs secure;

On that they reckon'd, and prepared
To row with skill, and strength unspared.

Fourteen fair barges in a row,
Started at once, with heaving prow;
With colours, flags, and plumes bedight;
It was forsooth a comely sight!
King Eric's seven rowers swarth,
Chosen from all the sinewy north,
Were men of such gigantic parts,
And science in the naval arts,
And with such force their flashes hurl'd,
They fear'd no rowers of this world.

King Eric, crown'd with many a gem,
Took station on his barge's stem;
Secure of victory, and proud
To shoot before the toiling crowd,
And spring the first upon the shore;
Full oft he'd done the same before.

Seven boats of either nation bore,
In proud array from Keila's shore,

With equal confidence endow'd ;
To each seven rowers were allow'd ;
But by the way they spied, with glee,
That one Scots barge had only three,
And she was bobbing far behind,
As toiling with the tide and wind ;
The rowers laugh'd till all the firth
Resounded with the boist'rous mirth.

Around an isle the race was set,
A nameless isle, and nameless yet ;
And when they turn'd its southern mull,
The wind and tide were fair and full ;
Then 'twas a cheering sight to view
How swift they skimm'd the ocean blue,
How lightly o'er the wave they scoop'd,
Then down into the hollow swoop'd ;
Like flock of sea-birds gliding home,
They scarcely touch'd the floating foam,
But like dim shadows through the rain,
They swept across the heaving main ;
While in the spray, that flurr'd and gleam'd,
A thousand little rainbows beam'd.

King Eric's bark, like pilot swan,
Aright before the centre ran,
Stemming the current and the wind
For all his cygnet fleet behind,
And proudly look'd he back the while,
With lofty and imperial smile.
O mariners! why all that strife?
Why plash and plunge 'twixt death and life?
When 'tis as plain as plain can be,
That barge is mistress of the sea.

Pray, not so fast, Sir Minstrel rath!
Look back upon that foamy path,
As Eric does with doubtful eye,
On little boat, that gallantly
Escapes from out the flashing coil,
And presses on with eager toil,
Full briskly stemming tide and wind,
And following Eric hard behind;
And, worst of all for kingly lot,
Three rowers only man the boat!—

" Ply, rowers, ply ! We're still ahead.
Lean from your oars—shall it be said
That the seven champions of the sea
Were beat outright by random three ?
Ply, rowers, ply ! She gains so fast,
I hear their flouts upon us cast.
'Tis the small boat, as I'm on earth !
That gave so much untimely mirth."—

" Curse on her speed ! Strain, rowers, strain !"
Impatient Eric cried again ;
" See how she cleaves the billow proud,
Like eagle through a wreathy cloud :
Strain, vassals, strain ! If we're outrun
By moving thing below the sun,
I swear by Odin's mighty hand,
I'll sink the boat and swim to land !"—

Hard toil'd King Eric's giant crew ;
Their faces grim to purple grew.
At last their cheering loud ye-ho
Was changed into a grunt of woe.

For she, the little bark despised,
And foully at the first misprised,
Came breasting up with skimming motion,
Scarce gurgling in the liquid ocean;
And by, and by, and by she bore,
With whoop of joy, and dash of oar!
The foremost rower plied his strength
On two oars of tremendous length,
Which boards on further end reveal'd,
Broader than Eric's gilded shield;
The monarch trembled and look'd grave
To see the strokes that rower gave.

Just then he heaved his oars behind,
Like falcon's wings lean'd to the wind,
As pass'd his little pinnace plain
The monarch's meteor of the main;
And, as he bent his might to row,
He struck King Eric's gilded prow
With such a bounce, and such a heave,
That back she toppled o'er the wave,
And nigh had thrown, as nigh could be,
Her king and champions in the sea.—

" Ho ! oar-room, friends ! your distance keep,"
Cried that rude Hector of the deep ;
" Ye-ho ! ye-ho !
How well we go !
Ours is the bark that fears no foe !"—

Then, not till then, King Eric saw
A sight that struck him dumb with awe ;
He saw that wight, the very same
In the last sport who overcame,
And now, by Odin's dread decree,
Had vanquish'd him most ominously.—
" Tis Lok the giant ! Lok again !"
King Eric cried in thrilling pain ;
" How flourish can our sovereign sway
If gods and demons both gainsay ?"—
" 'Tis Lok !" responsed each rower grim,
" Too oft I've thwarted been by him !"—

With sullen prow and lagging oar
The vanquish'd barges reach'd the shore,
But there the conquerors could not see
The boat stood leaning to the lee ;

An ancient boat, with wale and wem,
And gilded mermaid on her stem;
Then great the press and bustle grew,
That wondrous boat of hell to view,
Till an old man of Isla came,
And of the marvel made a claim;
He'd lent his boat for trivial fare,
But knew not who the hirers were.
That poor man got the prize prepared,
Or in its stead a meet reward.

The tossing of the pond'rous mall
Was won by Ross of Armidell;
And he who farthest threw the stone
Was from the Spey, his name unknown.
But when the rival archers came,
At target hung afar to aim,
The Scandinavians bore the grec,
For ages train'd to archery.
No bard can now detail those games,
Nor modern tongue express their names,
But at the setting of the sun,
Nor Scot, nor Norse, had lost or won;

The rival nations equal stood,
In feats of skill and lustihood;
One prize remain'd—one, and no more,
To stamp one side THE CONQUEROR!
And now, no living can conceive
The ardour that prevail'd that eve;
It was as if each nation's fate
Hung on the scale, it was so great.

The prize was one of high avail,
A Roman sword and coat-of-mail;
A sword most dazzling to behold,
Its basket was of burnish'd gold;
Such blade no Briton ever drew,
A two-edged blade of glancing blue,
Five feet from point to bandelet,
And yet when bent they fairly met.
A mighty Roman general wore
That sword and armour both of yore;
The feat of wrestling was the game,
On which each nation's pride or shame,
As on a balance heaving, hung,
While every patriot heart was wrung

With feelings of such poignant sway,
As none can rate this latter day.

A level field was fenced around
With palisades, mid rising ground,
And, after proclamation due,
Into that field the wrestlers drew;
But that no vantage one might gain,
The Norse and Scot went twain by twain;
Each prince and chief of note was there;
Threescore and four came, pair by pair;
Eric among the rest appear'd,
Who never man at wrestling fear'd.

The bugle sounded to begin,
And two by two, as they came in,
The wrestlers join'd most orderly,
With toe to toe, and knee to knee.
And there each stood with parched throat,
Waiting the bugle's warning note;
Then fiercely heel on heel 'gan dashing,
And bones and sinews rudely crashing,

And, ere the heart of keenest throes
Had beat on breast an hundred blows,
Or three short minutes were outgone,
Thirty and two were overthrown.

They counted heads of Dane and Scot,
And wrestled till the end by lot;
And, after many a strain and twist,
And many a bruised antagonist,
Two conquerors there stood reveal'd,
One at each corner of the field.
Eric was one in trial true;
The belted plaid and bonnet blue
Bespoke the country and degree
Of his tall comely enemy;
From his high bearing and his mien,
He seem'd some chief in manhood green;
All knew him as he forward came,
They said, though none could say his name;
But many an anxious eye was bent,
On this decisive throw intent.

Slowly they near'd, the stranger's air
Was sauntering, stately, void of care,
But Eric's eye had fiery glow,
Like that of planet rising low;
His brows the while projecting far,
Like dark cloud over rising star,
And once he started and uprear'd
His form, as if he treachery fear'd,
Or mark'd a feature undefined
That brought some guilty deed to mind.

The youth, too, paused, and still as death,
Like statue without blood or breath,
He stood, with hands half raised and bent,
And face fix'd on the firmament,
As if he wrestled had with Heaven,
Or with some strong enchantment striven.
Men were afraid, and Eric's jaw
Descended as oppress'd with awe,
For Lok across his memory came,
Like thrill of an electric flame;
But whether the youth the powers unblest
And adverse to the gods address'd,

Or look'd with suppliant's humble eye
To Odin's stern divinity,
Bow'd to the glorious God of Day,
Or own'd the Son of David's sway,
No one could guess; for in those times
These were the gods of northern climes.
This wild and solemn revery o'er,
Eric stood up the youth before,
And words of wonderment express'd,
How he had vanquish'd all the rest;
For that some champions had been thrown,
Who ne'er in prowess had been known
To yield to man, save one alone.

The youth no answer deign'd, or heed,
To this sly boast of matchless deed,
But moveless stood as form of stone,
And turn'd his eye to Beregon.
"Come, art thou ready?" Eric said.
The youth a slight obeisance made,
With due respect, as it behoved;
But neither hand nor foot he moved,

Till Eric laid his arms around,
And in his iron grasp him bound;
Then lithely did he square each limb,
And set his joints in proper trim.

The king that day had thrown his men
By heaving them aloft, and then,
With foot advanced, and ready knee,
Twisting them down full dexterously.
But when he tried that youth to foil,
He seem'd to grow unto the soil;
Despite the force of Eric's frame,
Which might of man could never maim,
That stranger wight, with careless air,
Preserved his footing firm and fair,
And circumvented with such sleight
His great opponent's perilous might,
That even the monarch's breathless jest
Began his doubts to manifest.—

"Ay, ay! so thou refusest even
To make one movement towards heaven?

Doesn't this bespeak a perverse mind,
And heart most sordidly inclined?
Well, some new mode we then must press
To suit thy taste of daintiness."—

With that the hero nerved his might,
And roused his spirit to the height;
That might which (save by wizard's charm)
Had never blench'd at mortal arm,
That so by one resistless throw
He might o'erpower this haughty foe,
And in the lists the highest place
Might still pertain to Odin's race.

The effort's past; the trip, the strain,
All given full sway, and given in vain!
And ne'er before had human eye
Beheld such marvellous energy,
Without all surliness or wrath;
But now King Eric gasp'd for breath
So sore, that every Danish eye
Saw double; many a heart beat high,

While ears sang out the torrent's lay,
Dreading the issue of the day.

The doughty youth had all this while
Nor utter'd word, nor deign'd a smile;
On the defensive kept he shy,
The monarch's utmost skill to try;
But now, with such an agile pace
That eye his motions scarce could trace,
He wheel'd, and sprang from side to side,
And sundry feints and amblings tried;
Till, ere on-looker was aware,
He struck King Eric's heels in air.
Yet to the game inured so well,
He caught the monarch as he fell,
And, as supporting him he stood,
These words nigh chill'd King Eric's blood:—
"Ah! God forbid that king renown'd,
And head with sacred honours crown'd,
Should fall degraded to the ground!"—

Although the faltering cluck was gone,
At once the tongue and voice's tone

Assured King Eric of the sway
That twice had vanquish'd him that day.
And to be thus within the clasp
Of giant Lok's own hellish grasp,
(Whom Scania's priests, a thing full odd!
Hold both a demon and a god,)
O that was such a direful case,
It spoke the end of Odin's race!—

"Down with immortal rivalship!"
King Eric cried, with quivering lip;
"This is unfair! Let mortal man
Vanquish King Eric if he can;
But with the Eternal's rival he
Presumes no chance of mastery.
I know thee, fiend! thy dreadful name,
Thy malice, and thy power supreme!
And, for one punishment condign,
Thy hate to Odin's heavenly line.
Though of the race of gods, thou art
A deadly demon at the heart!
And though in various forms this day
Thou hast o'ercome me in the play,

Be't known to all the world abroad,
To man I yield not, but a god.
For thou art Lok, that being stern,
Whom reason's eye can ill discern;
A god—yet virtue's deadliest foe,
And ruler of the realms below."—

The youth laugh'd a derisive peal,
And lightly turn'd upon his heel,
To work his way throughout the list,
And aye he mumbled as he press'd
Some scraps of high contempt, that spoke
Of " mongrel gods, and fabulous Lok."
And he had vanish'd in a trice,
As was his wont; but every voice
Call'd out to stop him, friend or foe,
That Albyn might her champion know.—
" Stop him !" cried Eric; " 'tis my mind
You may as well oppose the wind;
Or try to stop, by mortal force,
The lightning in its vengeful course."—

The youth was stay'd and brought to task;
All came to listen, few to ask;
And there they heard, without reserve,
From tongue they deem'd that could not swerve
From native truth; for there stood he,
Telling, in flush'd simplicity,
How he was all unknown to fame;
That poor M'Houston was his name,
Though some there were, on Erin's shore,
Call'd him M'Righ, and Eiden More,
He knew not why; but he had come
Of late to seek his native home,
And there had first that self-same day
Beheld his country's proud array;
That, eager in the lists to try
His youthful strength with princes high,
He had in various garbs appear'd,
And gain'd, because he nothing fear'd;
Having no title of renown,
Nor line, to bring discredit on.

With shouts that echoed far away,
And hush'd the waves on Keila Bay,

The sons of Albyn gather'd round,
And heaved their champion from the ground;
And with obstreperous acclaim,
Lauded M'Houston's humble name.
The Norsemen's looks were all dismay,
And dark as gloom of winter day,
As well they might; for he whose worth
They eyed as pole-star of the north,
By a Scots peasant overcome,
Stood sullen, mortified, and dumb!

The sword was brought, of magic mold,
And armour glittering all with gold,
And proffer'd to this wondrous guest,
Whom Eric mildly thus address'd:—

"This is thy prize, and fairly won;
But, as no man beneath the sun
Can this enormous weapon wield,
Or prove the armour and the shield,
Let them by friends appraised be,
And I'll pay down that sum to thee.

They are an old bequest. I may
Not part with them in sportive way."—

" No, sire; exchange there can be none;
The prize I claim, and that alone."—

" I'll pay it thee in warrior store,
In silver, brass, or golden ore;
So they be valued, here in sight
I'll pay thee triple for thy right."—

" No, I have said it; and I swear
By the great God whom I revere,
If proffer me thy royal throne,
The prize I'd have, and that alone."—

" Then take it thee; and be thou first
He that repents the claim accursed!
If I had ween'd that human might
Could e'er have reft them from my right,
I would have staked a kingdom's worth,
Ere that I valued most on earth.

Ah, hind! thou little art aware
Of what hath fall'n unto thy share!
Curse on these feats of youthful play,
Unmeet for men whose heads are grey!"—

M'Houston grasp'd the treasure bright,
And ran, and laugh'd with all his might,
Loud jabbering something 'bout the Sun,
And kingly treasures fairly won;
While many a youth of Albyn's land
Follow'd the wight along the strand;
With clamour vast, and song combined,
Till far upon the wavy wind,
Within the Connel's winding coast,
The loud and jarring sounds were lost.

Fair maid of Albyn's latter day,
How brook'st thou now thy shepherd's lay?
Dost thou not grieve that royal blood
Should yield to vassal's dogged brood?
And grievest thou not that beauteous Hynde
Should in old fortress be confined,

And ne'er appear in martial show,
In proud defiance of her foe?
And, worst of all, the wayward Wene,
That thing of whim, caprice, and bane,
Is lost! transported to the skies,
To Odin's barbarous paradise;
Or borne to place unknown to man,
Save some uncouth, outlandish clan;
While he, the premier of the brave
For maiden's love or warrior's glaive,
Prince Haco of the northern main,
Is lost upon the battle-plain.
Full sorely art thou cross'd, I ween,
In what thou wished'st to have been;
The amends lies not within my power,
But in thine own, beloved flower!

Be this thy lesson; pause, and think,
Fair seraph, leaning o'er the brink
Of sublunary joy and bliss,
The pale of human happiness.
Stretch not too far the boundary o'er,
To prove the sweets that float before,

Or certain is thy virgin meed;
To shed the tear and rue the deed!

Can nought allay that burning thirst,
That hath annoy'd thee from the first,
That fluttering hope that spurns control,
That yearning of the aspiring soul,
Which gilds the future with a ray
Still brighter than thy present day,
And onward urges thee to strain
For what 'tis ruin to obtain?

Ah! that inherent fault in thee
Has ruin'd worlds, thyself, and me!
While yet thy lovely mold was new,
And pure as dawning's orient dew,
Bright as an angel's form could be,
A flower of immortality!
Alas! when then thy sacred core
The germs of this impatience bore,
Which ill thy tongue can disavow;
What has thy bard to hope for now?

One grace he asks, a trivial suit,
That thou for once this flame acute
Wilt conquer, and peruse along,
Straight to the end, his epic song,
Else he shall rue it to his cost;
His hope, his little charm is lost.
And can'st thou tarnish by a look
The treasures of his valued book?
Valued alone, when it hath proved
Itself by Scotia's maids beloved.

He once was crown'd by virgin's hand
The laureate of his native land,
While many a noble lady's voice
Lauded aloud the fond caprice.
By virtue of that office now,
Which maiden dares not disallow,
He hereby, in the sacred names
Of reason, right, and regal claims,
Debars, with due and stern regard,
The following characters unspared,
From the plain banquet here prepared:—

First, he debars, without redress,
All those of so much frowardness
As yield them to the subtile sway
Of their great foe on primal day,
And, without waiting to contend,
Begin the book at the wrong end,
And read it backward! By his crook,
This is a mode he will not brook!

Next, he debars all those who sew
Their faith unto some stale review;
That ulcer of our mental store,
The very dregs of manly lore;
Bald, brangling, brutal, insincere;
The bookman's venal gazetteer;
Down with the trash, and every gull
That gloats upon their garbage dull!

He next debars (God save the mark!)
All those who read when it is dark,
Boastful of eyesight, harping on,
Page after page in maukish tone,

And roll the flowing words off hand,
Yet neither feel nor understand;
All those who read and doze by day,
To while the weary time away;
All maids in love; all jealous wives,
Plague of their own and husbands' lives!
All who have balls and routs to give
Within a fortnight; all who live
In open breach of any rule
Imposed by Calvin's rigid school;
All such as sit alone and weep;
All those who lisp, or talk in sleep;
Who simper o'er a fading flower,
Or sing before the breakfast hour;—
All such have more whereof to think
Than pages marbled o'er with ink;
And I beseech them keep the tone
Of their own thoughts—let mine alone.

All those must next excluded be
Who feel no charm in melody;
That dogged, cold, slow-blooded set,
Who scarce know jig from minuet;

And, what is worse, pretend to love
Some foreign monstrous thing above
Their native measures, sweetly sung
By Scottish maid in Scottish tongue.

He next debars all those who dare,
Whether with proud and pompous air,
With simpering frown, or nose elate,
To name the word INDELICATE!
For such may harp be never strung,
Nor warbling strain of Scotia sung;
But worst of guerdons be her meed,
The garret, poll, and apes to lead:
Such word or term should never be
In maiden's mind of modesty.
But little is the bard afraid
Of thee, to whom this tale is said.

Oft hast thou grieved his heart full sore
With thy sly chat and flippant lore;
Thy emphasis on error small,
And smile, more cutting far than all;

The praise, half compliment, half mock,
The minstrel's name itself a joke!
But yet, for all thy airs and whims,
And lightsome lore the froth that skims,
He must acknowledge in the end
To 've found thee still the poet's friend,
His friend at heart; would jeer and blame,
But aught degrading to his fame
Would ne'er admit, nor join the gall
Of slanderers mean and personal;
Therefore I bless thee, and engage
To profit by thy patronage.

Ah, how unlike art thou to those
(Warm friends profest, yet covert foes)
Who witness'd, grinding with despite,
A peasant's soul assume its right,
Rise from the dust, and, mounting o'er
Their classic toils and boasted lore,
Take its aerial seat on high
Above their buckram fulgency.
In vain each venom'd shaft they tried,
The impartial world was on his side;

Their sport was marr'd—lost was the game—
The halloo hush'd—and—eke the name!

Then lower stoop'd they for a fee
To poor and personal mockery;
The gait, the garb, the rustic speech,
All that could homely worth appeach,
Unweariedly, time after time,
In loathed and everlasting chime
They vended forth. Who would believe
There were such men? and who not grieve
That they should stoop, by ruthless game,
To stamp their own eternal shame?
While he, the butt of all their mocks,
Sits throned amid his native rocks,
Above their reach, and grieves alone
For their unmanly malison.

And so dost thou.—The base and mean
Will gloat, and scorn, and scoff, I ween.
So be it. We must now pursue
Our theme, for we have much to do;

And if before the closing measure,
I yield thee not the promised pleasure,
Then must I from my patrons sever,
And give my darlings up for ever.

END OF BOOK FIFTH.

QUEEN HYNDE.

BOOK SIXTH.

QUEEN HYNDE.

BOOK SIXTH.

No Muse was ever invoked by me,
But an uncouth Harp of olden key;
And with her have I ranged the Border green,
The Grampians stern, and the starry sheen;
With my grey plaid flapping around the strings,
And ragged coat, with its waving wings;
Yet aye my heart beat light and high
When an air of heaven, in passing by,
Breathed on the mellow chords; and then
I knew it was no earthly strain,
But note of wild mysterious kind,
From some blest land of unbodied mind.
But whence it flew, or whether it came
From the sounding rock, or the solar beam,

Or tuneful angels passing away
O'er the bridge of the sky in the showery day,
When the cloudy curtain pervaded the east,
And the sunbeam kiss'd its humid breast,—
In vain I look'd to the cloud overhead,
To the echoing mountain dark and dread;
To the sun-fawn fleet, or aerial bow,—
I knew not whence were the strains till now.

They were from thee, thou radiant dame,
O'er fancy's region that reign'st supreme;
Thou lovely Queen, of beauty most bright,
And of everlasting new delight,
Of foible, of freak, of gambol, and glee,
Of all that pleases,
And all that teazes,
All that we fret at, yet love to see!
In petulance, pity, and love refined,
Thou emblem extreme of the female mind!

O come to my bower, here deep in the dell,
Thou Queen of the land 'twixt heaven and hell;

Even now thou seest, and smilest to see,
A shepherd kneel on his sward to thee:
But sure thou wilt come with thy gleesome train,
To assist in his last and lingering strain:
O come from thy halls of the emerald bright,
Thy bowers of the green and the mellow light,
That shrink from the blaze of the summer noon,
And ope to the light of the modest moon!
O well I know the enchanting mien
Of my loved muse, my Fairy Queen!
Her rokelay of green, with its sparry hue,
Its warp of the moonbeam and weft of the dew;
Her smile, where a thousand witcheries play,
And her eye, that steals the soul away;
The strains that tell they were never mundane;
And the bells of her palfrey's flowing mane;
For oft have I heard their tinklings light,
And oft have I seen her at noon of the night,
With her beauteous elves in the pale moonlight.

Then, thou who raised'st old Edmund's lay
Above the strains of the olden day;

And waked'st the bard of Avon's theme
To the visions of his Midnight Dream—
Yea, even the harp that rang abroad
Through all the paradise of God,
And the sons of the morning with it drew,
By thee was remodell'd, and strung anew—
O come on thy path of the starry ray,
Thou Queen of the land of the gloaming grey,
And the dawning's mild and pallid hue,
From thy valleys beyond the land of the dew,
The realm of a thousand gilded domes,
The richest region that fancy roams!

I have sought for thee in the blue hare-bell,
And deep in the fox-glove's silken cell;
For I fear'd thou had'st drunk of its potion deep,
And the breeze of the world had rock'd thee asleep;
Then into the wild-rose I cast mine eye,
And trembled because the prickles were nigh,
And deem'd the specks on its foliage green
Might be the blood of my Fairy Queen;
Then gazing, wonder'd if blood might be
In an immortal thing like thee!

I have open'd the woodbine's velvet vest,
And sought the hyacinth's virgin breast;
Then anxious lain on the dewy lea,
And look'd to a twinkling star for thee,
That nightly mounted the orient sheen,
Streaming in purple and glowing in green;
And thought, as I eyed its changing sphere,
My Fairy Queen might sojourn there.

Then would I sigh and turn me around,
And lay my ear to the hollow ground,
To the little air-springs of central birth,
That bring low murmurs out of the earth;
And there would I listen, in breathless way,
Till I heard the worm creep through the clay,
And the little blackamoor pioneer
A-grubbing his way in darkness drear;
Nought cheer'd me on which the daylight shone,
For the children of darkness moved alone!
Yet neither in field, nor in flowery heath,
In heaven above, nor in earth beneath,
In star, nor in moon, nor in midnight wind,
His elvish Queen could her minstrel find.

But now I have found thee, thou vagrant thing,
Though where I neither dare say nor sing;
For it was in a home, so passing fair,
That an angel of light might have linger'd there:
I found thee playing thy freakish spell
Where the sun never shone, and the rain never fell,
Where the ruddy cheek of youth ne'er lay,
And never was kiss'd by the breeze of day;—
It was sweet as the woodland breeze of even,
And pure as the star of the western heaven,
As fair as the dawn of the sunny east,
And soft as the down of the solan's breast.

Yes, now have I found thee, and thee will I keep,
Though thy spirits yell on the midnight steep;
Though the earth should quake when nature is still,
And the thunders growl in the breast of the hill;
Though the moon should frown through a pall of grey,
And the stars fling blood on the milky way;
Since now I have found thee, I'll hold thee fast,
Till thou garnish my song—it is the last!

Sing of the dreary gloom, that hung
Clouding the brows of old and young
Through all the Scandinavian host,
And on the monarch press'd the most,
Who was of direful dreams the prey.
Some bodings of an olden day,
That told of trouble and of teen,
Of late fulfill'd had darkly been;
Foil'd by a hind before his host,
His consecrated armour lost,
That held a charm he valued more
Than aught his ample kingdom bore,
His scowl bespoke his heart's dismay,
And bore with it decisive sway;
For when in temper he was cross'd,
His was the mood of all the host.

Captain pass'd brother captain by,
Paused, beckon'd, waiting some reply;
But there was none, save look that spoke
Of direful deed; no hint was broke;
But all perceived the army's mood
Foreboded tumult, reif, and blood.

Well did they bode; the order flew;
King Eric out his legions drew,
Ranging his grim and hardy files
Around old Selma's stately piles.
In armour bright he walk'd alone
Before his host, and bade lead on
To force the Connel and the Croy,
To waste, to ravage, and destroy,
With fire and sword, and foray keen,
And none to save but Albyn's Queen.

Then waked his trumpet's brazen throat,
With such a copious rending note,
That rocks and doons began to pant;
The grey and solid adamant
Travail'd in anguish with the noise,
With the first throes of thunder voice,
And issued sounds that shook the spheres,
And silence of a thousand years.

Short was the march along the coast,
Till, lo, a herald met the host!

The same that first its rage appeased,
Now came to have his bond released;
Scotland's apostle there once more
Opposed King Eric on the shore.

The king at first in high disdain
Answer'd the sage, and scarce would deign
Exchange of speech; but such a grace
Shone in Columba's saintly face,
That Eric calm'd, and stay'd his van
To listen to the reverend man.—

"Sire, I was call'd to distant shore,
Which caused the breach we all deplore;
On God's own mission forth I went,
To save this Christian throne intent:
My purpose fail'd, but then, as now,
I trusted Heaven, and must avow
Our nobles' fraud; fearful, I ween,
Of parting with their youthful queen,
They have done that which monarch must
Declare right generous, though unjust;

They knew not Eric's honour high,
And now regret it grievously,
But must be pardon'd. List then me—
You've fought and conquer'd three to three;
But still your victory is not won,
Nor can be, ere to-morrow's sun
See Albyn's champions once more beat,
And then we yield us to our fate.
Our queen, with Scotia's coronet,
Shall on the combat field be set,
And whoso wins shall wear that crown,
And claim the maiden as his own:
She cannot wed all three, 'tis true,
But to her choice the three must bow."—

The king grinn'd in derision proud,
And shook his beard, and said aloud,
"Thou say'st? Then, shall my champions be
Men not endow'd to cope with me
In maiden's love? Of monstrous form,
I've plenty, thanks to clime and storm,
That are, for all their spurious brood,
A match for aught of Albyn's blood.

But, carping wizard as thou art!
Comest thou again to act a part
Of wheedling fraud, to chaunt and chime,
And gain a blink of loathsome time?
To practise some unholy scheme,
Some low and servile stratagem?
I say it boldly to thy face—
There is no chief of Albyn's race
Dares for his soul presume to stand
And brave again this deadly brand:
Thou know'st it, churl, as well as I:
Vile Christian! I thy power defy!
Thee and thy gods I hold as dust,
And in this arm and Odin's trust."—

"Say'st thou we dare not, sire? why then
Came I thus forth from Scotia's queen
These words to say? Hath she, as thou,
Swerved from her holy plighted vow,
And, without warning or pretence,
In savage stormy insolence,
Broke on thy ranks with havoc red?
No! such is not the Christian's creed!

Thou'rt the aggressor—doubly so:
This thou hast done, and, ere I go,
I'll say, if 'twere my latest breath,
Thou darest not fight and keep thy faith!"—

"Worm! reptile! dolt! What dost thou say?
Thou clod of cold presumptuous clay!
Dare such a being, sear'd and knurl'd,
Beard Eric of the northern world,
Whose arm has quench'd the Saxon's light,
And broke the German's iron might,
The Pole and Paynim overrun,
And beat the blue and bloody Hun?
Darest thou, in name of Christian cur,
Or virgin young, these honours blur?
He tells thee once again, and swears
By Odin's self, who sees and hears
This lifted hand, and solemn vow,
He'll fight your champions brow to brow:
And if none dares his arm withstand,
He'll fight the two best of your land:
Chiefs, kinsmen, sheathe your swords to-day
In peace, and measure back the way

Straight to the camp. If Odin speed,
To-morrow sees your sovereign's head
Circled by Albyn's ancient crown,
And honours of supreme renown !"—

Columba bow'd as it behoved,
But smiled to see the monarch moved
To such a towering tempest pride,
Which scarce to reason seem'd allied;
And as he gazed in Eric's face,
Some thoughts like these his mind did trace:—

" I've touch'd the proper peg that winds
That mounting flame of mortal minds
Up to the height ! O, God of Life !
Why madest thou man a thing of strife,
Of pride, and lust of power so high
That scarcely quails beneath the sky ?
Yet a poor pin, a scratch, a thrust,
Can bring his honours to the dust,
And lay the haughty godlike form
A fellow to the crawling worm !

I've sped; but thou alone can'st know
Whether I've sped for weal or woe:
O thou To-Morrow! who can see
What joy or sorrow waits on thee!"—

The seer retired, but quickly stay'd,
And turning short, to Eric said—
"Sire, I request, before I go,
From thy own lips this thing to know,—
Where be the maidens that were sent
As hostages unto thy tent?
For they were noble maids each one:
Then say, without evasion,
Where they are now, for words are said
Which tend thy honour to upbraid,
And manhood too. Then, pr'ythee, tell,
Where be the maids we love so well?"—

Eric look'd grave; his towering pride
'Gan in a moment to subside;
His speech sunk to a hollow calm,
And his pale lip bespoke a qualm

Of conscience, whilst these words he spoke:
" By all the gods, and dreadful Lok,
I know not—dare not hint a dread
Into what clime their fate is sped:
They are where they are call'd to be
By the Great King of Heaven's decree!"—

" Sire, I have nothing from this speech,
Vague as the voice on ocean's beach,
Of sounding billow bursting in
With harsh unmodulated din:
If thou hast dared such foul offence
As injure virgin innocence,
The curse of Heaven be on thy head:
Hence be thy valour pall'd in dread,
And all thy pomp and power decay——"

" Withhold thy dread anathema,"
King Eric cried; " I'd rather brave
The rage of Albyn's winter wave;
Her tempests wild, her headlands stern;
Her friths so crooked, dark, and dern;

Her nation's force in rear and van,
Than the vile curse of Christian man!

"Bring forth these champions of your land,
That mine may meet them brand to brand:
I dare them—If that will not do,
I'll fight the cravens one to two:
Thou hast my answer—speed thee hence;
And for thy nation's best defence
Be thou prepared; for if the queen
To grace the combat is not seen,
I swear by Odin's warlike name,
And Thor's, the god of fire and flame,
No lists shall be, nor warrior boast;
I'll pour my vengeance on your host,
And neither leave you root nor stem,
Memorial, name, nor diadem."—

Columba raised his hand on high,
About to make sublime reply;
But Eric to his trumpets' blare
Wheel'd off, and left the father there,

Like statue raised by wizard charm,
With open mouth—out-stretched arm—
Forehead uplifted to the sky,
And beard projecting potently.

There stood the seer, with breath drawn in,
And features bended to begin;
But, lo! ere he a word could say,
The king had wheel'd and sped away!
The sire relax'd his form the while,
His features softening to a smile;
And back he strode in thoughtfulness,
To tell the queen of his success.

He found her deck'd in youthful pride,
And blithesome as a maiden bride,
Resolved to trust her royal right
Unto her doughty kinsmen's might.
Despite of all her lords could say,
Who urged her from the lists to stay,—
She vow'd the combat she should see,
And trust in Heaven's ascendency.

Columba's prayers and counsels wise
Had from despondence clear'd her eyes;
While something he had said or done,
Unto all living else unknown,
Had raised her hopes to such a height,
They almost had outrun the right;
For aught her court could see or deem,
They were even forward in the extreme.
No matter! Hynde felt no annoy,
But of the combat talk'd with joy;
And of the manner she would greet
King Eric kneeling at her feet,
Or raise the chief that should him slay
Unto her throne that self-same day.

These rash resolves could not be lost
To any part of Albyn's host;
For all were summon'd to appear
That dared to stand the test severe;
While highest honours were decreed
To those whose valour should succeed
In saving Albyn's rights and laws;
That highest, most momentous cause

For which a hero ever fought,
Or sovereign hero's aid besought.

The evening came, and still no knight
Had proffer'd life for Scotia's right.
The morning rose in shroud of grey,
That usher'd in the pregnant day,
Big with the germs of future fame,
Of Albyn's glory or her shame!
And still no champion made demand
Of fighting for his sovereign's hand!

Just as the morn began to shower
Its radiance on Dunstaffnage tower,
Queen Hynde, array'd in robes of state,
Descended by the southern gate,
With face that own'd no hid distress,
But smiled in angel loveliness;
And there, amid the assembled crowd,
A herald thus proclaim'd aloud:—

"Here stands our virgin queen alone,
The sole support of Albyn's throne,

Craving the aid of hero's might,
To guard her and her sacred right:
If any here dares wield a sword
'Gainst Scandinavia's sovereign lord,
Or champions of his giant band,
Let such approach our sovereign's hand,
And tender here his envied claim,
That so enroll'd may be his name;
And Scotia's banners may not fly
O'er lists where none dares for her die;
The right, and left, and post between,
Must fall by lot—God save the Queen!"—

Still there was none that forward press'd;
Then first Queen Hynde's wan looks confess'd
An inward pang allied to fear,
A disappointment hard to bear;
Till Saint Columba by her side,
With locks of silver waving wide,
And spread hands quivering in the air,
Thus to the Heavens preferr'd his prayer:—

" O thou Almighty One, whose throne
O'erlooks Eternity alone!
Who once, in deep humility,
Lay cradled on a Virgin's knee,
Turn here thine eyes on one, whose face
Bespeaks the virtues of her race,—
Who in this time of dire alarm,
Puts not her trust in human arm,
But in thy mercy and thy truth.—
Then, O! in pity to her youth,
Preserve her to her native land;
Save the dear maid of thy right hand,
And rouse up heroes that may quell
The pride of braggart infidel.

" Yes, Thou wilt grant thy aid divine
To those who stand for thee and thine,
Wilt steel their hearts, and guard their heads,
Till of their high and glorious deeds
Their everlasting rocks shall ring,
And bards unborn their honours sing."—

Then bow'd the Saint his brow serene,
And tens of thousands said—AMEN!

The bugle's note, and herald's voice,
Proffer'd again the exalted choice
To every youth of noble mind,
To chief, to yeoman, and to hind,
Of fighting in his country's name,
For royalty and deathless fame:
Then up came courteous Sutherland,
And, kneeling, kiss'd his sovereign's hand,
Proffer'd his arm, his sword, his life,
To combat in the glorious strife;
Saying, he delay'd the honour dear,
In hopes that better would appear:
Then drew his lot, and fell the right,
To fight with Eric's left-hand knight.

Red Gaul of Ross came up the next,
And said these words with voice perplex'd:—
"My beauteous liege, I stood aloof,
In hopes some lord of more approof

Would eagerly rush forth to throw
The gauntlet to our reckless foe;
But, as I am, for Albyn's good
I dedicate my sword and blood."—

"I know full well, my generous lord,
No braver chief e'er drew a sword,"
The queen replied. "To such as thee
I well can trust my throne and me.
Now to the test, the final lot,
Whether you fight the king or not."—
He drew the left, and thereupon
To fight King Eric there was none.

From Hynde's dark eye, that glisten'd clear,
Was seen to drop the briny tear;
While yet a soften'd smile of pain,
Like sunbeam through the morning rain,
Unto her lords seem'd to confess
Their want of noble generousness.
Still good Columba cheer'd her on,
And bade her trust in Christ alone,

Who could his sacred pledge redeem
Even in their last and great extreme.

But time there was no more to say,
The boats were gather'd in the bay,
And the decisive hour drew near,
When Hynde must in the lists appear.
On board she went in joyless mood;
An hundred barges plough'd the flood;
While many a bold and warlike strain
Of music peal'd along the main,
That seem'd to say, in daring tone,
" Here comes the Queen of Caledon!
Who dares her royal rights gainsay?
Hie, braggarts, to your wastes away!
For, fume and banter as you will,
Old Albyn shall be Albyn still!"
Alas! what variance God hath seen
Between man's heart and outward mien!

It was a gorgeous sight that day,
When Hynde arrived in Keila Bay;

On high above her maidens borne,
Like radiant streamer of the morn;
A ray of pure and heavenly light,
Shining in gold and diamonds bright;
A lovelier thing, of human frame,
From armies never drew acclaim,
Or look'd more queenly and serene,
As, heaving o'er the billow's mane,
An hundred barges her behind,
Came rippling on before the wind;
And, as they sunk the waves between,
Seem'd paying homage to their queen.
Such freight ne'er sail'd on western sea;
A thousand dames of high degree,
With lords and gallants many a one,
Came with the Queen of Caledon.

The lists were framed and fenced around
With palisades on level ground;
And these again were lined the while
With warriors, rank'd in triple file.
Upon the east was raised a throne,
Where Hynde in all her beauty shone;

And dames unnumber'd, on each side,
Shone o'er the lists in blooming pride;
Their tartans streaming, row on row,
Bright as the tints of heavenly bow.

Sure 'twas a fair and goodly view!
Even Eric's dull and swarthy crew,
Whose minds had been bred up in broil,
Inured to blood and battle toil,
Acknowledged beauty's power supreme,
By looks of wonder's last extreme.
There one with half a glance might spy
The gaping mouth and gazing eye,
The turgid blink, the scowl askance,
The steril stare, the amorous glance;
The thousand looks that utterance found
In language mightier than in sound.
Ah, Beauty! but for woman's mien
And form, thy name had never been!

When all the wonted forms were past,
The judges' rules, the warning blast,

King Eric and his champions twain
Enter'd the lists the first again;
And there, in daring martial pride,
Walk'd round the ring with stately stride.
Brave Sutherland appear'd at length,
And Gaul, a burly mass of strength,
Gnarl'd and mis-shaped from toe to chin;
But, ah! the soul that frame within
Was pure, and brave, and calm, and just—
A pearl amid a coil of dust.

There was a pause; the champions eyed
Each other well, and talk'd aside;
Queen Hynde grew wan as winter snows,
Then ruddy as the damask rose,
As far she cast her humid eye,
O'er serried thousands crowding nigh;
But none rush'd in—(O hour of shame!)
To save his queen from foreign claim.

'Twas said, the bugle blasts between
Columba's lips were moving seen,

And his dim eyes to Heaven up-cast,
As that dumb prayer had been his last.
O read not dumb! What speech can feign
The language of a soul in pain!
That prayer, though made in deep distress,
Was not by creature succourless;
For, beaming from his faded eye,
There shot a ray of hope on high.

First to the queen King Eric kneel'd;
Then to the judges of the field
He turn'd, and said, "'Tis past the hour;
I claim my mistress and her dower.
Produce three champions of your land,
Or give my bride into my hand.
The pledge is forfeited. Think'st thou
We three will shed the blood of two?
No, by the gods!—But I alone
Shall fight that couple one by one:
Grant this, and I by it abide;
If not, then bring me forth my bride;
Or, by yon heaven, and burning hell,
And all that in the twain do dwell,

In carnage red I'll pen a law,
Such as your nation never saw!"—

"Hold, sire!" cried one of Scottish blood,
"This hasty challenge is not good.
The hour's not sped by half at least;
The shadow falls not to the east.
Yon arched oriel casement mark:
When its armorial rim grows dark,
The hour is past; till then 'tis meet
That thou should'st wait in mode discreet,
Since Albyn's hero's bold intent
Is thwarted by some strange event;
So it would seem; remain a while,
Till once the shadow from the pile
Falls eastward; then, with woful heart,
Old Albyn from her queen must part."—

To Selma's tower look'd one and all;
The sunbeam stray'd aslant the wall,
In scatter'd fragments, pointed bright,
Though scarce one hundredth part was light;

But still the casement's carved frame
Shone with a bright and yellow flame.
Each Scottish eye, as by a charm,
Fix'd on that tower in wild alarm,
Till every little gilded mark
Vanish'd amid the shadow dark;
Save that the casement's arch alone
With dim and fading lustre shone.
The last ray of the lingering sun
Is verging thence—the prize is won!

Columba rose, but not alone,
To lead the queen down from the throne,
And give her to the imperious hand
Of the oppressor of the land:
The tears stream'd o'er her pallid cheek,
She look'd abroad, but could not speak.
Then many a stifled groan was heard,
From breasts that were but ill prepared
To yield their queen to such a fate;
Ten thousand swords were drawn too late;
One moment, and the prize is won.
'Tis past.—The will of God be done!

What gathering shout is that begun?
Toward the list it seems to run!
It heightens, gains, and swells around,
The skies are shaken with the sound.
While dancing swords and plumes gave way,
Bespeaking tumult or deray,
Queen Hynde in middle step stood still,
Her sponsors paused with right good will,
And Eric stepp'd aside to see
What meant that loud temerity.
That moment through the lists there sprung
A warrior, stalwart, lithe, and young,
Cover'd with foam and ocean brine,
And blood upon his brigantine;
Then pointing to the oriel frame,
That still was tinged with fading flame,
He cried, "Behold, all is not lost!
I make appeal to Eric's host."—

"No! to himself thou shalt appeal,
To him who never yet did fail
On such request to yield a foe,
Or friend or kinsman, blow for blow!"

King Eric said. " Here's fame for thee
To win. Thou art the man for me
To match! for rarely have I seen
A comelier warrior tread the green!
Woe's me, for such a blooming spray,
Which I must level with the clay!"—

" Yes, I'm for thee!" that warrior said,
And threw away his belted plaid;
And lo! his panoply was braced
With belts of gold, and interlaced
With many a fringe and mottled hem,
Where lurk'd the ruby's burning gem.
Such princely champion ne'er before
Had gauntlet thrown on Albyn's shore!

Out through the host a whisper ran,
Which said, he was no earthly man!
But angel sent from God on high,
To help in great extremity.
Others there were, who said he bore
Semblance to Haco, now no more;

So lithe, so brisk, so void of fear,
So brilliant in his warlike gear:
A ray of hope, like wildfire's gleam,
From maidens' eyes began to beam;
But in the eye of warrior grim
That ray of hope was deadly dim.
Ah! how could youth, whate'er his worth,
Excel great Eric of the north,
Whose arm had spread, through human kind,
Dismay before, and death behind?

Forthwith the deadly strife began;
Clash went the weapons, man to man.
Harold of Elle, a Danish knight,
Was match'd with Gaul, on Eric's right;
And Hildemor, from Bothnia's strand,
Was match'd with seemly Sutherland;
Gigantic heroes, bred to strife,
And combat yearly for their life.

In that fierce onset to the fray
There was no flout nor giving way;

To work they fell, with blow and thrust,
And strokes that shore the level dust,
From shields descending. Then, anon,
Flickering in air their weapons shone,
With crossing clang so fierce and high,
As if the javelins of the sky,
The livid lightnings, at their speed,
Had met and quiver'd o'er each head.

But soon both wings, as with assent,
Paused, and stood still, to gaze intent
On the tremendous strife that grew
'Twixt Eric and his foeman new.
Such rabid rage on combat field,
No human eye had e'er beheld;
They tried to wound, but ne'er below,
Round, round they battled, toe to toe,
But not one inch would either flee;
They fought on foot—they fought on knee—
Against each other fiercely flung;
They clang'd, they grappled, and they swung;
They fought e'en stretch'd upon the green,
Though streams of blood ran them between.

Thou ne'er hast seen the combat grand
Of two wild steeds of southern land,
Rivals in love: How grows their rage,
And shakes the fen when they engage!
Or two wild bulls of bison brood—
The milk-white sovereigns of the wood
And the dire echoes that outyell
The grovelling, bellowing sounds of hell!
To view these savages aloof,
Rending the ground with horn and hoof,
Or meet to gore, and foam, and die,
Is scarce a sight for maiden's eye!
Or two huge monsters of the wave
Rearing their forms, with lash and lave,
Far up the air; there snort and howl,—
Then, grappling, sink with groan and growl,
While the red ocean boils ahight,
And nature sickens at the sight.

Such wars have been since Eden's day,
When thou first err'd, and peace gave way;
Yes, such dread scenes have daily been,
Though such thine eye hath never seen;

And if thou hadst, as nought they were,
Unto the mortal combat there,
Where heroes toil'd in deadly strife,
For love, for empire, and for life.

It was as if two Alpine hills,
Lords of a thousand rocks and rills,
And sovereigns of the cloudy clime,
Had once in battle join'd sublime;
Together dash'd their mighty heads,
Those grey and grisly pyramids,
The footstools to the gates of heaven;
Think of them shatter'd, torn, and riven!
And down the shrieking steeps beneath,
Red rolling o'er a waste of death.

Such was the strife, while every heart
Around them bore a trembling part.
Ah! many an eye was dimm'd of sight,
When, in the terrors of their might,
They saw the heroes grappling fast,
And deem'd each struggle was the last;

But no! They seem'd two beings framed
Not to be wounded, foil'd, or maim'd.

Three times they closed within the shield;
Twice roll'd they down upon the field;
But then, 'gainst Eric was the odds,
They heard him cursing by his gods!
And when they parted for a space,
A wildness glared in Eric's face;—
A haggard rage not to be told,
A something dreadful to behold.

'Twas as if spirit from the earth,
Proud of its righteousness and worth,
Had hurried to the gates on high,
Passing poor pensive journeyers by;
But lo! when at the gates above,
The paradise of peace and love,
He finds all entrance there denied,
And the poor ghost is thrust aside;
Barr'd from the presence of his God,
And banish'd to some drear abode,

In darkness and in chains to lie
Through ages of Eternity!
Think of that spirit's woful case,
The lines of his deploring face,
And livid hues 'twixt black and wan,
And think of Eric if you can.

This dread expression was not miss'd
By the eye of his antagonist,
Who, without wooing strength or breath,
Rush'd in for victory or death.
But Eric still withstood his shock;
He fought, a tower, a strength, a rock,
That ne'er had bow'd unto the blast,
And knew no yielding till the last.

At length their motions grew more slow,
Their swords fell lighter every blow;
And all perceived they near'd the last,
And the bitterness of death was past:
On swords that bent and stream'd with blood,
They lean'd, and stagger'd as they stood;

Yet grimly levell'd eye to eye,
And not one inch would either fly.
The conflict's o'er—wild tremour reigns,
And stillness for a space remains.

King Eric was the first that fell:
Down like a tower with groan and knell
The prince of heroes falls supine!
A shudder pass'd through Norway's line,
Yet none durst enter in the list,
Although upon the monarch's breast
The foot of conquering foe was set,
And sword upraised in vengeful threat,
His royal head and trunk to sever,
And close his conquests up for ever.
None interfered, nor call'd it crime.—
Such were the statutes of the time.

But fate withheld the stroke design'd,
For, like the willow in the wind,
The conqueror's plume began to bow,
And nod and totter to and fro;

Then back he stagger'd on the field,
Low bending o'er his sword and shield ;
And ere his panting breath was gone,
He reach'd the rail and lean'd thereon ;
Then hands were stretch'd, (why should they not?)
That loosed his gorget from his throat ;
His helm and corslet they untie,
And all his belted panoply ;—
And though no mortal wound they saw,
The blood oozed through at every flaw.

The champions on the field that stood,
Still gazing on the deadly feud,
Now, without languor or remark,
Flew to the combat stern and stark :
When, strange to tell ! the Lord of Ross,
The warrior shapeless, gnarl'd, and gross,
So hardly press'd the giant Dane,
That round and round upon the plain,
He made him shift and shun the strife,
Then fairly turn and fly for life.
Gaul follow'd ; but as well he might
Have chased the red deer on the height,

As his tall enemy, that strode
Slow round the field with taunt and nod;
Gaul waddling after, sword in hand,
Puffing, and cursing him to stand;
Loud rang the shouts around the pale,
And laughter gibber'd on the gale.

On the other hand the strife was sore
'Twixt Sutherland and Hildemor;
It was a combat to be seen,
If premier combat had not been,
To which all others, when compared,
Sunk into things of no regard.
Keen was the strife—the Scot gave way,
Either in need or galliard play;
And, as he wore across the field,
They reach'd a spot of blood congeal'd,
Where, as the Swede rush'd on his foe,
He slid, and stumbled with the blow;
When Sutherland, with ready slight,
Met in his fall the hapless wight,
And pierced the corslet and the core
Of the redoubted Hildemor:

He roll'd in blood, and aptly tried
To stem the red and rushing tide;
Then feebly at his foeman struck,
And cursed his gods for his misluck:
The accents gurgled in his throat—
Still moved the tongue, but speech was not;
And, with a spurn and hideous growl,
Out fled the giant's murky soul.

Now, two to one, the flying Dane
In gnashing terror scower'd the plain;
His king and his companion gone,
A madness seized the knight upon;
He tried to leap the circling piles,
For shelter 'mid the Danish files,
But was repulsed with fierce disdain,
And thrown back headlong on the plain:
No hope thus left him in the strife,
He kneel'd to Gaul, and begg'd for life.—

"No," said the chief; "it may not be!
The devil waits dinner for the three!

Henceforth with earth thou hast no tie,
The man is damn'd that dreads to die :
But one relief for thee is left,
And, here it is."—With that he cleft
The stalwart craven to the brow,
Severing his ample brain in two.—

" Beshrew thee for a bloody Scot,
If thou'st not done what I could not !"
Said Sutherland, as turning by,—
But seeing the tear in Ross's eye,
And sorrow on his nut-brown cheek
So deep that word he could not speak,
The burly chief he kindly press'd
Unto his bold and kindred breast.

The day now won, a wild dismay
Blench'd every cheek of Norroway !
The list now oped to Odin's priest,
Who ran to have his king released ;
Upraised his huge and fainting frame,
And comfort spoke in Odin's name ;

While leeches plied with licence brief,
But, ah! the case was past relief!
Seven deadly wounds, and all before,
Told them great Eric's reign was o'er.
Still, not one sentence he had spoke,
But whisper'd o'er the name of Lok.
Lok! Lok! that name of terror hung
Alone upon his dying tongue.

One told him, that, on Albyn's side,
Detraction had a tale supplied
Of a low hind, M'Houston named,
Who not even birth or lineage claim'd,
Yet had achieved this wondrous deed,
Laid low in dust that royal head,
And dared, even on his great acquest,
To set his foot on Eric's breast!

When this the hero heard, he roll'd
And writhed, as if in serpent's hold;
And from his motions it was plain
He deem'd he fought the field again;

While, from his eye's impassion'd gleam,
And smile of fury, it did seem
He thought his fame he could redeem.

At length, with throbbings long and deep,
Calm as a child about to sleep,
That softly lifts imploring eye
Unto the face of parent nigh,
So lay, so look'd, in piteous case,
That terror of the human race!
And so must all the achievements vast
Of this poor world end at the last!
He stretch'd the priest his hand to hold;
That hand was bloody, glued, and cold!
While these last words hung on his breath,
"Appease the gods!—Revenge my death!"

Leave we the uproar and distress
Which Norway's chiefs could ill suppress;
And pass we over, for a while,
To Hynde, the flower of Albyn's isle,
Who saw, with joy ne'er felt before,
Her gallant champion Eiden More

Upraise his pale and wounded head,
Like beauteous phantom from the dead,
And wipe his bloody brow, and say
The faintness quite had pass'd away;
For untried armour wrought the harm,
And not the force of Eric's arm.

The nobles now, with clamorous glee,
Brought to the queen the conquering three,
And bade her choose a sovereign lord,
With whom they all should well accord:
So was she bound in her distress,
And in th' event could not do less.
The courtly Sutherland look'd down,
As guessing well to whom the crown
Was destined. As for Eiden More,
(Or poor M'Houston, call'd before,)
Leaning and pale he took his stand,
And turn'd his eyes on Sutherland,
As one his sovereign soon to be;
But burly Gaul fell on his knee,
And said, with sly and waggish whine,
" My liege, I hope the chance is mine?"—

The queen descended to the green
With lightsome step, but solemn mien;
And, passing Ross and Sutherland,
She took M'Houston by the hand,
And, with a firm unalter'd voice,
Said, " Here I make my maiden choice.
Since thou hast come without a meed
To save me in my utmost need;
And, sure, though humbly born, thou art
A prince and hero at the heart;
So, next my Saviour that's above,
Hence thee I'll honour, bless, and love."—

M'Houston's cheek grew pale as snow,
And the cold drops fell from his brow;
He raised his blood-stain'd hand, and seem'd
About to speak; and, as they deem'd,
He meant his sovereign to dissuade,
And disapprove of all was said:
But ere a word his tongue could frame,
Forward rush'd lord, and noble dame,
And chief, and squire, in courteous way,
Due homage to their king to pay.

For all extoll'd, with ready tongue,
The bravery of a hind so young;
And vow'd by such a hero's hand
In utmost danger firm to stand.
With prayers, and vows, and blessings said,
The crown was set upon his head;
Then shouts ascended on the wind,
"Long live King Eiden, and Queen Hynde!"

Need was there for a leader brave,
For Norway's host, like wave on wave,
Began to move with backward motion,
Like tide receding on the ocean;
Only to come with double sway,
Resistless, on its sounding way.

The king's last words had moved the host
To grief and rage the uttermost;
And without head to rule the whole,
The tumult grew without control;
Distant from home, and in command
Of the great bulwark of the land,

The soldiers swore that land to have,
Or of green Albyn make a grave:
Even Odin's priest approved the choice,
And only ask'd for sacrifice!—

"Now is the time!" the soldiers cried,
"While Albyn's army is employ'd
In joyful rite, and must repass
Yon straits with all their force in mass!"—
The chiefs gave way, and join'd the flame,
For why, their notions were the same;
And thus their army moved away
To set the battle in array.

Eiden, the new-made king, beheld
The movements on the adverse field;
And cried, in firm commanding tone,
"Each Scottish leader, straight begone,
And range your clans these columns under,
For lo, a storm is gathering yonder!
And, if maturely I foresee,
Dreadful the breaking out will be!

" Meantime, let all the dames of birth
Speed to the boats and cross the firth;
For, in such dangers, woman still
Is a dead weight on warrior's will.
Dread not our strength, though some may scoff,
There's help at hand you wot not of;
Mine be the chance to lead the van,
And fight on foot the foremost man;
Stranger, I am to take command;
But, as my guardians on each hand,
I choose forth Ross and Sutherland.

" Haste! there is not a moment's speed
To lose, else we shall rue the deed.
See that these orders be obey'd,
And promptly. If they are delay'd
By any here, better his head
Had been laid low among the dead!"—

The lords were stunn'd almost to death:
They stared and gasp'd as if for breath.—
" What's this?" said they. " A peasant's son
Speak thus to chiefs of Caledon!

Better we had our deed revoke,
Than bow our necks to such a yoke!"—

Eiden perceived that they demurr'd,
And, heaving high his mighty sword,
Which token gave of lustihood,
Bestain'd with Eric's royal blood—
"My lords," said he, "the danger's nigh.
Who's to command?—Is't you or I?—
By your award the right is mine;
When you ordain it, I resign.
But my commands are given to-day,
And he that dares to disobey——
I *say* no more—submission's best—
If more must be, I'll *do* the rest."—

One of M'Ola's haughty race,
Who held and ruled the forest chase,
Along the lofty hills that lie
'Twixt Lochy's side and Kyle-an-righ,
By sad mischance a speech began
To this resolved, impatient man;

A speech that tended more t' inflame
Proud opposition than to tame.

King Eiden stepp'd across the space,
With scowl portentous on his face;
And in the midst of all his kin
He clove the chieftain to the chin.—
" If more such speeches be to say,
We'll hear them out some other day.
This moment's ours—the next, I wis,
Is his who best improveth this."—
He said, and, heaving his claymore,
Resumed the stand he held before.

The chiefs were awed at such control;
Such energy of frame and soul
They ne'er had witness'd among men,
Far less in upstart denizen;
Still there were some aloof that stood,
Unused to yield to vassal blood.

Just at that instant, through th' array
A troop of strangers burst their way;

Led by an ancient chief, who rode
A stately steed, with silver shod.
And O that chief was stern to view!
His robe was crimson set with blue;
While on his head, like spheral crown,
Stood broad and belted chaperon;
His face was bent like curve of bow;
His hair as white as Alpine snow;
His grey beard, quivering with disdain,
Hung mingled with his horse's mane.

Soon as he spied King Eiden stand,
With bloody sword rear'd in his hand,
He cried, "Ah, varlet! Do I see
Thee where I swore thou should'st not be?
How darest thou rear that bloody glaive
Before my face, thou saucy knave?
Hast thou been at thy old misdeeds
Of breaking swords and splitting heads?
Thy mad temerity confest
Hath drawn an old man from his rest.
Curst knave! I have thee at the last!
Seize on him, friends, and bind him fast!"—

" Hold, dearest sire, for mercy's sake !
The time is precious ; all's at stake.
To-day I have a task to do ;
To-morrow at thy feet I'll bow."—

" Ah, thoughtless, froward, frantic boy !
Thou'st come to combat for a toy ;
To fight with one will put thee down,
And for a foe that wears thy crown.
But I'll prevent it. Ne'er shall man
Before my face thy youth trepan.
Seize on the stripling, I command ;
I'll bind him with this aged hand !"—

" Sire, I've already fought and won ;
The great decisive deed is done.
This day thy grandson's hand hath slain
Great Eric of the northern main ;
Hath gain'd for thee supreme renown,
And won my father's ancient crown ;
And, what is more than power or fame,
I've won the flower of all our name !"—

" What! Thou, young eaglet of the rock!
Brave scion of a noble stock!
Hast thou our sister realms set free
Of their relentless enemy?
The man who hath for twenty years
Kept us in terror and in tears;
Who all despite to me hath done;
Hath slain my kinsmen one by one;
And my two sons, too rashly brave,
Brought both to an untimely grave!
Ah! knave and vagrant as thou art,
Come let me hold thee to my heart!

" Ye chiefs of Albyn, cease your noise!
List Colmar King of Erin's voice!
This is your prince whom I embrace,
The flower of all our royal race;
King Eugene's son of soul refined,
And cousin to your sovereign Hynde;
M'Houstons both, as you know well,
And that old dotard monk can tell.
The truant fled me in disguise,
To seek adventures most unwise;

I follow'd, and sent men away
To seize him ere the combat-day,
Who last night found him in his bed:
He slew my officers and fled!
And, in despite of earth and hell,
Has done this day what you can tell.

" Yet he hath that which man exalts,
For all his foibles and his faults;
O, he is brave! most nobly brave!
Forgive these tears; I love the knave!
And here to Albyn's fair command
I join the crown of Erin's land.

" Fear not the north's huge power combined;
Ten thousand men come me behind;
Who, with Prince Eiden at their head,
Such havoc and deray shall breed
'Mongst that detested brutal host,
Glad shall they be to leave your coast."—

Then the old pagan moved his crown
From off his head, and kneel'd him down,

And thus, with reverend lifted eye,
Address'd his bright divinity :—

" Thou glorious SUN, my father's god,
Look down from thy sublime abode
On thy old servant's sacred joy,
And bless this brave and blooming boy :
Not with the common light of day
Be thou director of his way,
But on his inward spirit shine
With light empyreal and divine ;
For thousands on his reign's success
Depend for mortal happiness.

" And when thou leavest thy heavenly path,
To sojourn in the realms beneath,
Be charges of him nightly given
Unto thy lovely Queen of Heaven ;
Who, with serene and modest face,
Watches above the human race,
And sways by visions of dismay
The spirits prone to go astray ;

For 'tis not hidden from thy sight,
That dangers of the silent night,
Dangers of women's witching smile,
Of wassail, waik, and courtier's wile,
Far deadlier are to virtuous sway
Than all the perils of the day.

" And now, thou source of light and love,
Great Spirit of all things that move!
If thou wilt hearken to my prayer,
I'll such a sacrifice prepare,
As ne'er on beal-day morn did smoke
Beneath thy own vicegerent oak.

" O blessed SUN, I here avow
Thee for my only god, and bow
Before thy bright and holy face,
Sublime protector of my race!
Whilst thy omnipotence shall burn,
Creation's father'd eyes must turn
To thee for life in donative,
And every comfort life can give

I ask but life for me and mine,
Whilst thy transcendent glories shine;
If farther world of bliss there be,
To Christian souls I yield it free."—

Columba, hearing all reveal'd,
Before the ancient monarch kneel'd,
And cried, " O king! did I not say,
That this thy son should Albyn sway?
That he was destined—he alone,
To save his father's ancient throne?
Thou didst oppose the high decree
As far as influence lay with thee;
Now it hath happ'd in way so odd
That man could not the event forbode:
But who can thwart the arm divine?
Thanks to another God than thine!"—

Colmar look'd with averted stare
On the good father kneeling there;
But deeming him below reply,
He only hemm'd, and strode him by;

Then, taking Eiden by the hand,
He led him forth along the strand,
Heaving his ample shield in air,
And wildly shaking his white hair;
And with deep sobs and laughter blent,
He wept, and shouted as he went,
" Who buckles brand on brigantine,
To follow Houston's son and mine?
The top of Albyn's royal tree!
Who's for King Eiden and for me?"—

The Scottish nobles, mad with joy
At finding there was no alloy
Yet mingled with the metal good
Of Fingal's and the Fergus' blood,—
With shouts, and songs, and one assent,
To battle rush'd incontinent.

The Norse came on—As well they might
Have tried to stay the morning light,
The torrent turn by sword or spear,
Or stop the storm in its career.

The Danish men came in the van
On Sutherland's and Ross's clan,—
And dreadful was their onset shock,
On the small plain beneath the rock;
Thousands were slain; and, woe to tell!
There Colmar, King of Erin, fell;—
And Gaul of Ross, as brave a lord
As ever wielded warrior's sword:
But clan on clan, like billows toiling,
Came panting on, for battle boiling,
And swept the Danish host before,
Like wreck upon the ocean shore,
Which every wave drives on and on:—
So roll'd the strife tow'rds Beregon.

To tell of all the deeds of might
That there were done from morn to night,
Would steep my virgin patroness
To the fair bosom in distress:
And to relate the deeds of doom
Wrought by the royal young bridegroom,
Would class my song 'mid fabulous lore,
A folly I indulge no more.

Whene'er a breach was made in flank
Or rear of Albyn's battle rank,
There was M'Houston to supply
The breach, and quell the enemy:
Alas! he struck a foe too late
When brave old Colmar met his fate;
But yet the sire upraised his head,
And feebly laugh'd, and bless'd the deed;
Then, bending back his rigid form,
Like shrivell'd pine beneath the storm,
He fix'd his latest visive ray
Upon the glorious God of Day;
And some weak piping sounds were heard,
As if a joy with terror jarr'd;
The parting spirit's last recess
From dust and dreary nothingness!

The battle spread from cliff to shore,
Along the fields, where late before
The Danes and Norse the battle won
That drove the Scots from Beregon:
This day that order was reversed,
The invader's closest files were pierced,

And foot by foot forced to give way ;
Till, at the to-fall of the day,
Their speed of foot they 'gan to try
Within the city gates to fly :
They wanted Eric in their van,
Which brave M'Houston overran.

Cold, stretch'd upon his ample shield,
King Eric's corse lay on the field ;
Deserted in the flame of fight,
When Norway's files wheel'd to the right.
That and old Colmar's, side by side,
Were borne in barge across the tide,
That funeral honours might be paid,
When to Iona's isle convey'd.

The tidings of the battle won,
And mighty deeds the king had done,
And who he was, on wings of wind,
Flew o'er the ferry to Queen Hynde :
Then of her joy supreme I wot
A bride may judge, but man can not.

Meantime, as deep the darkness grew,
Eiden march'd over Drimna-huah,
And down upon Bomean Moor
Descending at the midnight hour,
He found the enemy's camp at rest,
Without a guard to east or west;
Nought there remain'd in shape of foe,
But wounded men and menials low;
For all within the city gate
Had fled, on learning the defeat;
And many, less intent on prey,
Unto the fleet had stolen away.
Spoil was there none, save armour good,
And hides, and furs, and beastly food;
And ere the dawn of morning came,
That mighty camp was all on flame;
A sight that cheer'd each Scottish glen,
But woful one to Norwaymen!

On the return of morning light,
Full grievous was that army's plight!
Without a general of respect,
Or prince, or leader, to direct,

Save one was qualified the least,
Odin's most high and potent priest!
At board, at muster, or in field,
No warrior council Eric held;
Through life he suffer'd no cabal;
King, general, he was all and all.
But this bluff priest, in wondrous way,
Held over him perpetual sway;
While his last hest, "the gods to appease,"
Made this old fox's powers increase;
Save him, the host would list to none;
They ran to him, and him alone.

Until that time, King Eric's word
Had saved the city from the sword,
From pillage, and the thousand woes
That conquer'd city undergoes;
And he had saved the innocent
From the last throes of ravishment.
But now this foul and bloated priest
Issued forthwith the loved behest,
To take the city for a prey,
The loss and charges to defray;

To ravish matrons, great and small,
Whether in city, field, or hall,
By way of fair and just reprise:
But keep the maids for sacrifice!
And once that great oblation made
Unto the gods, as Eric bade,
The priest would answer with his head,
For Odin's high and heavenly aid.

The soldiers lauded with acclaim
The priest of Odin's blessed name;
And darted on the spoil away,
Like hungry tigers on their prey;
Then was a ravishment begun,
Such as in warfare hath been done,
But suits not ear of virgin young,
Nor aged minstrel's weary tongue.

One hundred virgins, richly dress'd,
Were brought before this goodly priest;
And out of these selected he
His god's own number—three times three;

Those that remain'd by lot were shared
Amongst the soldiers of the guard.
O, grievous chance! sure death was bliss
To such a hideous doom as this!
Well might they say, on such a lot,
Is there a God in heaven or not?

Unto the top of Selma's tower,
Beyond the reach of human power,
The nine were borne for sacrifice,
With songs and shouts that rent the skies;
And the poor victims of despair
Were stretch'd upon an altar there.

By this time many a weeping dame
Had fled that hive of sin and shame,
And fled to Eiden's camp on high,
Still placed upon Doon-Valon-Righ.
All other comforts he disdain'd,
Compared with the advantage gain'd;
And there above his foes he hung,
Like osprey o'er the gannet's young.

But ah! the rueful news that came,
Distracted every warlike scheme:
There lay the victims in their view,
Surrounded by the hideous crew;
And Selma's seven towers could then
Have guarded been by twenty men
Against a thousand. Such a scene
May Christian ne'er behold again!
The hymns of Odin that ascended,
Mid screams of death and horror blended,
Form'd such a dire discordant yell,
As sinner scarce shall hear from hell,
When through the far domains of night
He takes his drear reluctant flight,
By power unseen impell'd behind,
That sails him swifter than the wind,
To some unfathom'd gulf below,
Which minstrel fears, but does not know,
Of utter darkness and of dread,
The very spring and fountain head!—

"O Christian sire! if thee 'tis given
To influence the powers of Heaven,

For woman's sake, though shunn'd by thee,
For hers who nursed thee on her knee,
Now use it; for no earthly power
Can save in this distressing hour!
Pray Him, in whom my soul believes,
Trembles before, but not conceives,
To send relief—O, father, cry!"
King Eiden said, with streaming eye.

Columba stood amidst the men,
And sung a hymn from David's pen;
Then kneel'd upon the flinty rock,
The Almighty's succour to invoke;
But ere his God he had address'd,
Or suppliant word to him express'd,
The shouts from Selma's turrets sounding,
And tens of thousands these surrounding;
And smoke ascending to the sun,
Told that th' unholy deed was done.

The king, the saint, and warrior bands,
Upon their faces laid their hands,

That on such scene they might not look,
Nor the abhorr'd remembrance brook;
But good Columba bent his eyes
On heaven, and, with most vehement cries,
Implored his Saviour and his God,
To smite with his avenging rod
Those rude and violating beasts,
Those vile polluted idolists,
Who dared to stain the murderous knife
In Christian virgins' sacred life.
And, as 'tis told in ancient rhyme,
Some words like these, in tone sublime,
He mutter'd to the Eternal's ear,
Which made the kneelers quake to hear:—

"Father of angels and of men!
Thou, whose omniscient heedful ken
Takes in the ample bounds of space,
Wherever smiles the human face,
Or seraphs sing, or angels dwell,
Or demons that in torment yell:
Turn here in mercy from above
One glance of justice and of love;

Of love to those who look to thee,
And justice on their enemy,
And view a deed that stamps disgrace
On thy beloved human race.
O God! can such a deed beseem
Creatures thou died'st to redeem?—

"If thou Jehovah art alone,
And Odin but a god of stone,
Pour down thy vengeance from the skies
On these polluted obsequies.
View but the deed, and ere 'tis done
In darkness thou wilt veil the sun;
His flaming orb shall cease to burn;
The moon and stars to blood shall turn,
While the broad sky aside shall fold,
And like a garment up be roll'd.—

"O, if thou comest—as come thou wilt,
Vengeance to take on human guilt;
Then be thy wrath in terror shown,
By thunders from thy awful throne;

Descend in majesty supreme;
Thy chariot be devouring flame;
That all the elements may die
Beneath the lightning of thine eye.
The vales shall yawn, in terror rending,
The mountains quake at thy descending,
Nay, bow their hoary heads, and heave
Like skiff upon the yielding wave.—

"Stretch but thy finger from the spheres
Towards these bloody worshippers,
And lo, the sinners and the spot
Shall quickly be as they were not!
As things of terror no more seen,
Nay, be as they had never been.

"Our eyes are fix'd on thee above,—
Our hope in thy redeeming love:
Then, O, in mercy to our race,
Hear—in the heavens thy dwelling-place!"—

While yet the Christian army kneel'd,
Ere brow was raised from rock or shield,

Heaven's golden portals were unbarr'd,
And the Almighty's voice was heard!
It came not forth like thunders loud,
When lightnings through the liquid cloud
Break up the dense and dismal gloom,
With chafe, with chatter, and with boom;
It came with such a mighty sound,
As if the heavens, the depths profound,
And tempests at their utmost noise,
Cried all together in one voice.

Deep call'd to deep, and wave to wave;
Stone unto stone, and grave to grave;
The yawning cliffs and caverns groan'd;
The mountains totter'd as they moan'd;
All nature roar'd in one dire steven;
Heaven cried to earth, and earth to heaven,
Till both the offenders and offended
Knew that the Eternal God descended.

After the voice a whirlwind blew,
Before it every fragment flew

Of movent nature, all in cumber,
And living creatures without number
Were borne aloft with whirling motion:
It lifted ships out of the ocean;
And all, without one falling shiver,
Were borne away, and lost for ever;
But there were cries of death and dread
Heard in the darkness overhead!

After the wind, with rending roll
A crash was heard from pole to pole,
As if the Almighty's hand had rent
The ample yielding firmament;
Or split with jangle and with knell
The adamantine arch of hell;
And, lo! from out the heavens there came
A sea of rolling smouldering flame,
Which o'er the sinners' heads impended,
And slowly, dreadfully descended;
While with their shouts the welkin broke,
"Great Odin comes! our god, our rock!"—

Just while their horrid sacrifice
Still flamed with incense to the skies;
Just when their hearts were at the proudest,
And their orisons at the loudest,
The liquid sounding flame inclosed them,
And roll'd them in its furnace bosom!
That city fill'd with loathsome crime,
With all its piles of ancient time,
After the fiery column broke,
Scarce gave a crackle or a smoke,
More than a heap of chaff or tinder,
But melted to a trivial cynder!—

Scarce had the eye of trembling hind
Regain'd its sight—with terror blind,
His heart began to beat in time,
Or shudder'd at the heinous crime,
Ere the appalling scene was o'er!
One single moment, and no more,
All glitter'd with a glowing gleen,
Then pass'd as they had never been.
Walls, towers, and sinners, in one sweep,
Were solder'd to a formless heap,

To stand, until that final day
When this fair world shall melt away,
As beacons sacred and sublime
Of judgment sent for human crime.

Adieu, dear maids of Scotia wide,
Your minstrel's solace and his pride—
The theme that all his feelings move—
Of grief, of pity, and of love;
To you he bows with lowly bend;—
His ancient tale is at an end.
More would he tell, but deems it best
That history's page should say the rest.

There thou may'st read, and read with gain,
Of Eiden's long and holy reign;
How Haco and his winsome Wene
Were Scandinavia's king and queen;
How much he owed her in his sway,
And loved her to his latest day.

He and his inmates to a man,
Dress'd in the garb of Highland clan,
(Of Skye-men, whom they slew in fight,
When Donald Gorm was beat by night,)
The maids had rescued from the pile,
And borne them to some western isle:
Thence they return'd to Albyn's coast
In wedded love, when all their host,
Save those within the ships that lay,
Had melted from the world away,
And were received with greetings kind
By Eiden and his lovely Hynde.
'Twas there that ancient league was framed,
For wisdom, peace, and justice famed
For many ages—Blest is he,
Thus hallow'd by posterity!

END OF BOOK SIXTH.

NOTICES

RESPECTING NAMES, PLACES, &c.

Beregonium—A celebrated ancient city; the first capital and emporium of the Scots in Albion. Its castle, according to Boethius and Harrison's Chronologie, was founded by King Fergus, so early as 327 years before the birth of our Saviour, and 420 years after the building of Rome. Around that castle (the Selma of Ossian) the city had continued to extend for the space of several centuries, until at length the marble chair and the seat of government were removed to Dunstaffnage, on the southern side of the bay. The site of Beregonium is in that district of ancient Lorn now called Ardchattan, although Boethius includes it in the bounds of Loch-Quhaber. The castle, situated on the top of a huge insular rock, near to the head of a fine bay, and in the midst of a level plain, must, at that period, have been rendered impregnable, without any great effort in fortification. It is altogether a singular and romantic scene; and, being situated on the new road from Dalmallie to Fort-William, by Connel Ferry and Appin, it is well worthy the attention

of the curious, and, indeed, of every tourist interested in the phenomena of nature. That this city, with its towers and palaces, was destroyed by fire from heaven, tradition, song, and history, all agree; and if ever oral testimony from an age so distant was borne out by positive and undeniable proofs, it is in this case, so much out of the course of nature and providence. All that remains of this mighty citadel, with its seven towers, is one solid mass of pumice, burnt and soldered together in an impervious heap, wholly distinct from the rock on which it is situated. The outer wall, as well as the forms of the towers, may still be traced, but all are melted down to trivial and irregular circles of this incrusted lava. And as there can be little doubt respecting the existence of this renowned castle and city, so it is manifest, to me at least, that no human operation could ever have effected so mighty and universal a transmutation as is there to be witnessed.—*See* MACCULLOCH's *Letters, Edinburgh Encyclopædia, &c.*

In the place where the city stood, two streets, well paved, are still easy to be traced by a little digging; the one of these is called in Gaelic, Market Street, and the other, Meal Street. In making the new road, a vaulted gangway was here discovered under ground; and about twenty-five years ago, a man, in digging fuel, found one of the large wooden pipes that had conveyed the water across the plain to the citadel. These few remains of the famous Beregonium have been preserved in the bowels of the earth; but nothing remains above ground, either of city or walls, but a few irregular lines of trivial cynder.

M'Houston—This hero's name is, it seems, wrong spelled throughout—a natural error of a Lowlander. It ought, I am told, to have been M'Uiston; signifying the son of Eugene. He was the son of King Eugenius, the third of that name, long the ally, but at last the conqueror, of the far-famed Arthur. This Eiden More, (Aiden the Great,) on his father's death, was, with his mother and infant brother, removed into Ireland by St Columba, and afterwards restored to his throne by the diligence and influence of that holy man. In most things regarding him, the Poem accords with history. He succeeded his uncle; married his uncle's daughter; embraced Christianity; and reigned over the Scots thirty-seven years in great prosperity. Columba lived to an exceeding old age; and after his death King Eiden seemed to have no more spirit or pleasure in this life, but quickly followed his great friend and patron to the grave in A. D. 579.

Eric—The following short translation from an ancient Runic Ode, was handed me by a correspondent, as probably relating to the death of this northern hero:—

"Before Berigholmi did we fight with swords. We held bloody shields, and well-stained spears. Thick around the shores lay the scattered dead. There saw I thousands lie dead by the ships. We sailed seven days to the battle in which our army fell.

"We fought again; and then the bow uttered a twanging sound, sending forth tempests of glittering steel. It was at the time of the evening the foe was compelled to fly. The King of Erin did not act the part of the eagle—he fell by the bay. He was given for a feast to the ra-

vens.—A great storm descended—O ye sons of the fallen warriors! who among you shall tell of the issue of that dreadful day? The Gods were angry, and before their vengeance who shall stand!—THERE ERIC FELL, than whom there was no greater king. The sword dropped from his hand—the lofty helmet was laid low.—The birds of prey bewailed him who prepared their banquets.

Human Sacrifices—That this picture of Scandinavian worship may not be viewed as an exaggeration, I shall quote the words of the learned M. Mallet. "The appointed time for their sacrifices was always determined by another opinion, which made the northern nations regard the number THREE as sacred, and particularly dear to the gods. Thus, in every ninth month they renewed the bloody ceremony, which was to last nine days; and every day they offered up nine living victims, whether animals or human creatures. Then they chose among the captives in time of war, and the slaves in time of peace, nine persons to be sacrificed. The choice was partly regulated by the choice of the bystanders, and partly by lot. The wretches upon whom the lot fell, were treated with such honours by all the assembly;—they were so overwhelmed with caresses, and with promises for the future, that they sometimes congratulated themselves on their destiny. The priests afterwards opened the bodies, to read in the entrails, and especially the hearts, the will of the Gods, and the good or evil fortune that was impending. The bodies were then burned, or suspended in some sacred grove near the temple. Part of the blood was sprinkled upon the people, part of it upon the grave; with the same they also bedewed the images, the altars,

the benches, and walls of the temple, both within and without."—*See Intro. Hist. Den.*

Scotticisms—There are perhaps numbers of these scattered throughout the poem, but as I never guard against their introduction, so I neither can recollect, nor point them out; as instances,

Gallow—To gallow, in old English is, *to cow, terrify;* but in Scotch, it is *to make a loud, broken, or discordant noise*; and in this sense it is always used here. Gallow and Gollow are synonymous, and peculiar to various districts.

Gleen—To shine, to glitter, *v.*—A bright dazzling gleam, *s.*

Torfel—To toss, to overpower; also, to roll over, to struggle with an overpowering force.

Collied—Darkened, overshadowed.

To-fall of day—The close of day, eventide.

Steven—Uproar.

THE END.

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